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“DRUSILLA’S POINT OF VIEW”

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"Drusilla's Point of View"

A STORY OF LOVE

BY

MADAME ALBANESI

AUTHOR OF

"The Strongest of All Things"

"Love must be as much a light as a flame."

—THOREAU.

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TO MY FRIEND

OLIVE PATTINSON

To whose delightful personality with its
illuminating freshness and unconscious
'joie de vivre' I owe so many hours
of sunshine, I dedicate this little
story of love.

E. M. A.

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DRUSILLA'S POINT OF VIEW

CHAPTER I.

DRUSILLA HERONWORTH paused when she got to the bend in the staircase and stood looking down on her sister with a faint smile on her lips. She was dressed for walking, and wore the most bewitching toque of sable, with a real gardenia pinned in it. There was a sable stole thrown loosely about her shoulders. She watched her sister moving slowly about the hall. Bertha Heronworth walked with a slight limp.

A large tray filled with vases of flowers had been brought in and placed on one of the tables, and Miss Heronworth was putting these vases in different corners.

The hall was a low-roofed, square-shaped apartment, having about it something of a farmhouse look. It was furnished in a comfortable, homely kind of way, and though not used exactly as a living room, possessed many comfortable chairs, and one, at least, seductive corner, where one could read, or work, or sleep most peacefully. "You always put the flowers just where they ought to go," said Drusilla. "That bit of pink on your writing-desk is simply lovely, Beth, and oh—" with an appreciative sniff, "how sweet something smells! What is it?"

The elder sister looked up at that charming figure leaning over the balustrade.

"So, after all, you are going out," she said.

Drusilla answered :

"Yes, after all, I am going out. I don't want to go one little bit; but I feel that if I don't have a walk at least once every day I shall get so fat." She gave a little sigh ; then she said : "Beth, I'm ever so happy ! I can't begin to tell you how happy I am."

Bertha Heronworth picked up some splendid specimen chrysanthemums and re-arranged them in the tall glass vase.

"It is very cold this morning," she said, "and very damp. I hope you have on thick boots, Drusilla."

Drusilla laughed.

"Oh ! Beth, prosaic Beth ! I discourse to you about happiness and you talk about my boots." In the same breath she said : "Those specimen chrysanthemums are very magnificent, I suppose, but I don't care a pin about them, they are so grand and so artificial. Chrysanthemums always remind me of Aunt Edith."

"Where are you going ?" asked her sister.

Drusilla shrugged her shoulders.

"I have no plan ; I shall just wander unless you have something you want me to do ?"

"Well, if you are only going for a walk, will you leave this note at the Rectory, and some papers for me at the Cottage Hospital ? I always send all the light literature there ; it is so much appreciated."

Drusilla made a grimace and then said :

"Yes, I don't mind. Must I go ?"

"They would be very glad to see you," said Bertha ; "but don't bother, if you would rather not ; just leave the papers at the gate."

Drusilla came down the last of the stairs very slowly.

"Really and truly, there is no place like home," she observed. "After having been in all sorts of other people's

houses, I am in a position to assert this positively. Beth, I shall never, never, never go away again ! ”

Bertha Heronworth laughed at this.

She turned and came across to her sister, and firstly she felt the sleeve of Drusilla's coat, and then she stooped and examined the sole of the very smart little boot which peeped from under the serge skirt.

There was not the smallest point of resemblance between the sisters. Although there was undoubted character in the face of the elder Miss Heronworth and a certain sweetness and charm in her expression, she was not what is even called good-looking ; her one beauty was perhaps her hair, which was most abundant, and she had a particularly agreeable voice, a quality shared by Drusilla.

As she stooped to assure herself that her sister was sensibly shod, the other girl patted her smooth head.

“ Darling,” she said, “ you don't know—you can't even imagine—how I have longed to be back with you ! ”

There was a flush on Bertha Heronworth's face.

“ I wonder ? ” she queried, “ I wonder if that is really true, or only just one of your pretty ‘ Drusilla ’ speeches ? ” Then she drew the girl nearer to her and kissed her tenderly. “ At any rate,” she said, “ I am glad to have you here once again. The weeks you were away seemed like years, Drusilla. I am only afraid that you will feel dull. We must get some people here ; people you like.”

Drusilla flung down her big sable muff and began to pull on her gloves.

“ Oh ! I want to be dull ; life has been going at such a pace lately I feel as if I had weeks and weeks of sleep to make up. At Braske, you know, they never go to bed till two or three o'clock ; no chance of beauty sleep there. Do you know what Catherine said to me this morning when she brought me my tea ? ‘ Law, Miss ‘ Drusilla, you're

growing quite haggèd ; you look every bit of forty, that you do ! ”

Then she laughed.

“ Is it true ? ” she asked. “ Have I lost my looks ? Would you take me to be forty or only thirty-nine, if you met me for the first time ? Be truthful, Beth ; I want to know the worst ! ”

“ You haven’t told me anything about your visit to Braske. Who was staying there ? Anybody you liked very much ? Your letters were most unsatisfying, you know, naughty child,” said Miss Heronworth, returning to her flowers.

“ It was rather amusing,” the girl answered languidly, after an imperceptible pause. “ Kitty Deravan is such a good hostess, she is always contriving something new. We had a paper chase one night.”

“ One night ? ”

“ Yes,” Drusilla laughed, and her eyes sparkled as at some delightful recollection ; “ we had to hunt with lanterns, of course, and we found ourselves in all sorts of extraordinary places. I think the village people thought we had gone mad. I really enjoyed it though, and all the wild doings, but still I am ever so glad to be home again. And it’s sweet of you, Beth, to be glad to have me back ? But I knew you wanted me. Even if you have bought the most wonderful library in the world, and there is a mysterious and attractive young librarian to live on the premises, aren’t I better than anybody or anything else ? Now I am ready,” Drusilla announced ; “ where are the papers, and have you anything else you want me to do ? ”

Bertha Heronworth shook her head as she tied up a number of illustrated papers in a stout roll.

Whilst she waited, Drusilla asked :

"Beth, does Mr. Keston ever speak? I can't make him talk; he won't even look at me. I suppose people who always live amongst books must get dull; but he is awfully clever, isn't he?"

Miss Heronworth said "Very" in her quiet way, and there was the faintest note of restraint in her voice as she added: "And he is just the right sort of person to help me. I was so grateful to Mr. Lethbridge for sending him here; he won't stay very long."

"Oh!" said Drusilla lightly. "I don't mind how long he stays. He is certainly good to look at, even if he is dull and perhaps I shall be able to wake him up a little before he goes. By the way, they were talking about your purchase at Bräske.* Lord Deravan declared the nation ought to be grateful to you, Beth, as all the good things in books and pictures seem to be going to America nowadays."

"I think I am lucky. Happily for me," said Miss Heronworth, "negotiations had been commenced between Lord Caroby and myself some time before his death, and he had left expressed wishes that I should be given the first chance; otherwise I am not very sure that I should have got this library. Of course," she added, laughing with a little nervousness, "the purchase has meant a very big sum of money, but Mr. Lethbridge regards it in the light of a very excellent investment."

"I don't think it matters what Mr. Lethbridge thinks," said Drusilla coolly, "so long as you are satisfied; and I am so glad, dearest, that you have at last spent a little money to please yourself. You are always doing more than enough for other people, goodness knows!"

The roll of newspapers was tied securely, and Bertha Heronworth weighed it in her hand a little anxiously.

"I hope it won't be too heavy for you, and Drusilla,

don't go across the fields ; there is really a nasty wind to-day ; keep to the road."

"Haven't you any other errands ?" asked Drusilla. She paused on her way out. "Look here, when I come back, can't I write some letters for you ? You really ought to have a secretary, Beth ; if I'm no good, why can't Mr. Keston help you ?"

"Letters never bother me, as you know," answered Bertha Heronworth ; "and there is more work in the library than you can imagine. Lord Caroby was an enthusiastic collector, but he never made the smallest effort to have his books put in proper order. From what Mr. Keston tells me, they seem to have been sent here massed together in extraordinary confusion. Then there is a great quantity of valuable manuscripts, and these must be properly tabulated and fixed in cases ; and, of course, I want a really good catalogue."

"Things which will keep Mr. Keston pretty busy. Well, if I can't help you, perhaps I can help him. I have come home resolved to do all sorts of sensible things. You know, Beth, it is really time I began to be useful."

"There are so many useful people in the world," said the elder sister. "Good-bye, don't get into mischief."

"Mischief !" echoed Drusilla. "Good heavens ! don't you realize that I am a virtuous person ? Why, if all the Ten Commandments were spread out before me now I should refuse to break one. Honour bright I should !"

She blew a kiss to her sister and turned away, passing to the back portion of the house, where she whistled to the dogs. As they came tumbling about her she said meditatively to herself :

"Mischief ! Happily there is not a ghost of a chance of doing anything foolish down here. Now if I had stayed on at Braske, it might have been a different thing ! I

am glad I insisted upon coming away, and yet,—” As she started on her walk she gave a little sigh, followed by a little laugh. “Mischief can be very sweet,” she said, “sometimes.”

The dogs made havoc of her trim serge skirt. They were wild with joy at the prospect of going for a walk with her ; but first of all, there were so many people who wanted to have a word with Miss Drusilla.

The younger sister was in fact adored by the household, whilst Bertha Heronworth, with a few exceptions, commanded respect rather than love—a touch of irony which so frequently fashions the conundrums of everyday life.

It was not merely a duty, but a source of personal pleasure with Miss Heronworth to interest herself in one and all about her. She knew all the various ailments of her various servants ; she remembered the number and the condition of their relations ; she allied herself with them sympathetically, and studied them in every way ; yet she never once obtained from them that whole-hearted appreciation which they lavished upon Drusilla.

Bertha Heronworth, for instance, would never have dreamed of peeping into the kitchen except when she considered it convenient to be received. Drusilla walked in just whenever she felt inclined. On this particular occasion she perched herself on the corner of the big kitchen table, whilst the tribe of dogs (swept out of this domain as a general rule by the autocratic mistress of it) paddled about with dirty paws on the red-tiled floor which had just been scrubbed.

It was only after Drusilla had eaten a small home-made cake, which she did not want, and had swallowed half a glass of milk which she loathed, simply because she was expected to do these things, that she realized the condition

of the floor. But she was so sorry, and she said she was sorry so prettily, that the cook was prepared to go down on her knees there and then and take up the mud stains just to ease Miss Drusilla's mind !

From the kitchen the girl went to the stables, and as she was crossing the courtyard, a man wheeled swiftly past her on a bicycle. He took off his cap as he saw the younger Miss Heronworth and Drusilla smiled and nodded.

"So the bookworm does come out of his lair every now and then," she said to herself. "I wonder where he is going."

Casson, the old coachman, met Drusilla, and told her that his invalid wife was sleeping after a very bad night.

"Then I won't disturb her now. I'll come again this afternoon and see her," said Drusilla. "I've got a present for her, Casson. Tell her not to get tea for me or to make any fuss."

It was such a cosy little home up the narrow staircase above the coach-house. In far-off days Drusilla remembered that it was wont to be one of her most delightful treats to be allowed to spend an afternoon with Mrs. Casson.

The coachman himself was portly and full of rheumatism ; he should have been pensioned, but he would still insist on driving Miss Heronworth, and looked with eyes of jaundiced contempt on the splendid motor-car which had been introduced into the establishment to please Miss Drusilla.

It would, however, have taken a great deal more than a motor-car to have displaced Drusilla Heronworth from the proud affection which the old coachman lavished upon her, although it must be confessed that he had passed a sleepless night following the arrival of that forty horse-power Panhard at Crowder Chase.

"And is it walkin' you'll be, Miss Drusilla?" he asked her now, with a twinkle in his eyes, "when you might be drivin' and killin' on the road as you go?"

"And sure it's walking I'll be," said Miss Drusilla, and she laughed in his face. "I'll have you out with me, Casson, for a spin before many days are gone. I'll wake you up for once in your life, Casson!"

But Casson shook his head.

"Horses'll do my time, miss, and I don't want rousin', not in that way, anyhow!"

Drusilla laughed again, and tucking her roll of newspapers securely under her arm, walked quickly out of the stable-yard with the dogs skirmishing about her.

When she had progressed a little way she stopped and turned to look behind her. This was one of her favourite spots. Time after time in the days of her schoolhood she had brought out her sketching block and had tried to set down in immature fashion the impression of the old house she loved from this particular point.

Since she had left the school-room and had begun to wander, Drusilla had seen many other houses—grander houses, houses stately without and within, but no place was to her so beautiful and so desirable as this little old-fashioned dwelling where she had lived all her young life.

She was perfectly well aware that she regarded Crowder Chase with a loving prejudice, for to many people the house was little more than a country villa, charmingly surrounded and comfortable enough, but altogether too small and unpretentious for people so wealthy as Bertha and herself.

Drusilla, however, had a happy knack of ignoring the opinion of others; moreover, she was truly feminine in her sentimental loyalty to everything which belonged to

Bertha and her home-life ; hence, Crowder Chase remained to her the dearest place in the world. She turned now sharply, and, following her sister's directions, she kept to the road after she had left the grounds, and she walked briskly through the cold wind for some distance, talking nonsense to the dogs, and throwing occasional stones and sticks for them to run after ; and all at once, when she came to a gateway, she paused and rested the bundle of newspapers on top of it.

"Light literature, indeed !" she said, and then she laughed ; and then she laid her cheek on her arm and fell into a dreamy mood whilst the dogs stood waiting with panting tongues and expectant eyes.

Evidently Drusilla's thoughts were engrossing. She seemed to have drifted far, far away from the reality of things ; not even the chill sting of the wind, nor the damp of the ground on which she stood had power to rouse her. Gradually the remonstrative whine of Bob, the fox-terrier, became a mournful howl, and still Drusilla did not move. She might possibly have remained in this fit of abstraction for a much longer period, had not the roll of newspapers chosen at this moment to slip from her arm and fall with a plump into the mud on the other side of the gate. There was only one way of regaining possession of the papers, and that was to climb the gate and pick them out of the mud.

To cleanse them Drusilla conceived the happy idea of rubbing them on the rough back of Danny, the Scotch terrier ; then she climbed over the gate again and went on her way to the Cottage Hospital.

At the entrance to the hospital grounds she met the young man whom she had seen leaving the stable-yard at Crowder Chase on a bicycle. Drusilla gave Brian Keston a radiant smile.

"How do you do? Isn't it a nice cold, grey day?"

She put out her hand so that Keston was obliged to stop. He looked very annoyed, awkward and shy—but Drusilla continued to smile at him.

"So glad you are having a little air and exercise," she said; "of course, this is a very wonderful library which my sister has bought, and I am quite sure that you are an enthusiast about books; but I am equally quite sure it can't be good for you to be shut up all day in a musty, dusty atmosphere. Now I am home again we must change this. I wonder if you would be so good as to give these papers in at that door?"

He did her bidding with an almost undisguised lack of graciousness; but the girl's eyes only sparkled.

When he came back to her, she said:

"I am going to the village to post postcards; please come with me."

Without a word he went to where his bicycle was standing and wheeled it into the road.

He was as conscious of Drusilla's beauty and elegance as he would have been of the warmth of the sun, had it deigned to shine on him just then; but he was absolutely unused to intimate contact with women of any kind, and in the presence of Drusilla he felt uncomfortable. Moreover, as he had come to her home as a paid official, any intimacy seemed to him out of the question.

There was, however, about the younger Miss Heronworth a touch of imperiousness which demanded obedience, so he did as she wished.

It was very uphill work carrying on a one-sided conversation. Consequently, Drusilla ceased in a little while to make remarks and came to questions.

"What were you doing at the hospital?" she asked.
"Did my sister send you with a message also?"

Stiffly, and with that curious reluctance in his manner to be in the least degree sociable, Keston informed her that there had been an accident early that morning in the village, and that he had been one of those who had been able to render help.

"An accident?" said Drusilla quickly, her colour fading just a little. "What sort of an accident? Who is hurt? Not anybody I know?"

"It is one of the boys at the mill. I think his name is Rogers."

"Not—Phil Rogers?"

The girl stood still suddenly in the middle of the muddy road.

"I *hope* it isn't Phil Rogers," she said. "Oh! Mr. Keston, is he badly hurt?"

Keston said:

"Yes," just that and nothing more.

Drusilla turned.

"Don't wait for me, please; I must go back. I know this boy very well. His mother was at Crowder Chase years ago as a servant; she married one of the gardeners. Phil is all she has. If he is seriously hurt I think it will break his mother's heart."

Keston turned and walked back with her rapidly:

"You are not going to see him?" he asked.

He noticed that she was very pale.

She nodded her head.

"Yes, of course I must see him."

"I don't think there is any 'of course' in the matter," Brian Keston said. "And you can't do any good."

Drusilla turned on him with a flash.

"That is rather rude, Mr. Keston," she said. "How do you know I cannot do any good?"

He answered her quietly.

"I don't mean to be rude, I only want you to understand that I do not think you ought to go. I daresay they will admit you because you are Miss Heronworth, but I am quite sure that everyone in the hospital will agree that it will not be right for you to see this boy in his present condition. There will have to be an operation," he added. "His mother has been informed—she is with him."

Drusilla walked on, taking no notice of his words, and he placed his bicycle by the gate and followed her through the neat gardens up to the red-brick building. She passed in through the porch, and he went also.

The matron came hurrying when she heard that Miss Drusilla Heronworth wished to see her. She said exactly what Mr. Keston had said.

"It is very, very good of you, but I do not think you had better see the poor boy. Dr. Redgood is with him, and we are expecting Mr. Bates, the surgeon, from the town as soon as he can get here. If they had not managed to stop the machinery the boy must have been killed."

She gave a few more details, and Keston, watching the girl closely, noticed how Drusilla winced and how white her lips grew.

It was an act of impulse which made him put his hand on her arm and firmly lead her out into the air. He did not release his hold until he saw that Drusilla could stand alone, and that the colour was creeping back into her cheeks.

They walked slowly away from the hospital, and neither spoke until they had gone some distance; then Drusilla turned to him with a faint smile.

"It is rather nice of you, Mr. Keston," she said, "not to say 'I told you so,' but I had to go."

The young man answered :

"I quite understand your wish to offer sympathy to the mother or to do anything in your power for the boy, but you serve no good purpose by willingly seeking to harrow yourself with the sight of suffering which you cannot help."

"I don't pretend to explain this sort of thing," said Drusilla a little impatiently. "I only know one *has* to do things which are not easy or agreeable! Of course, I don't mean always," she added. "I mean when circumstances force this kind of position upon one."

"I am afraid I don't see very much reason in that kind of argument."

Drusilla lost her temper just for an instant.

"Reason!" she said. "Why must there always be a reason for everything? I hate people who sit down and work things out mathematically. The best things in life are spontaneous, because then they are sincere. I am sure if you stop to think about it," she said lightly the next moment, "you will agree that it was at least a nice idea on my part to go and see poor Phil."

He frowned ever so slightly, and his sense of impatience, of something approaching to dislike for this girl flashed into being again. If he could with all courtesy have left her, he would have done so willingly; but Drusilla, with conscious perverseness, kept him beside her.

She had a charming gift of words and could talk fluently upon any given subject without any knowledge whatever of that subject. It delighted her to talk now. That sense of poignant sympathy and of physical repugnance which the thought of any bodily suffering always produced faded away quickly. The hospital lay well behind them. If she had not entirely forgotten the injured boy, at least she did not remember him so acutely.

"You must not think," she said to him as they ap-

proached the village,, "that I want to come into contact with things that hurt—I don't—I really hate suffering. I am afraid I hate sorrow. I could not live in shadow ; but I have a curious sense of duty. I feel I must do certain things just because I hate doing them."

"That is not duty," Brian Keston said curtly. "That is an hysterical misconception of things as they are."

Drusilla laughed.

"I believe I shall like you, Mr. Keston," she said, "because you are argumentative. I was afraid when I met you that you were going to be tiresome and dull, because you sat like a stone and never said a word. If you will only quarrel with me now and then, I shall get quite fond of you. I have no use for people unless they can talk, and unless they will let me talk. I won't go any farther now. Would you mind leaving this note at the rectory ? I'll wait for you."

She watched him as he walked briskly away. From the very first she had realized that he was attractive—also, that he was indubitably a gentleman. Now she realized that he was just a little different from most of the men with whom she had been in contact lately.

His clothes were shabby—his manners not exactly polished, but she found him interesting, and she was quite glad that he was going to stay some little while at Crowder Chase ; for, despite her protestations of happiness, she was just a little tiny bit dull at home.

There had been so many strange elements in the atmosphere which had surrounded her just before her return to her sister

As she waited for Keston to do her errand he gradually went out of her thoughts, and another figure took his place.

Three of the dogs had followed him ; but Danny was

always faithful. He had sat down in the mud close to Drusilla's feet and was waiting patiently for her word of command to move on. Drusilla stooped, and patted the dog's head ; then she gave a quick sigh.

"It is simply idiotic," she said, addressing herself, "and I never remembered anybody in this sort of way before. Why can't I stop thinking about Carlingford? When Beth begins to ask me questions about what I did at Braske, and who I met there, I always try to speak quite naturally, and to tell her all about him ; but the very moment I am going to speak his name I get scarlet in the face, and terrified lest Beth should imagine all sorts of things which don't exist."

She gave another quick sigh.

"And the horriest part of all this is that I daresay he has forgotten my existence! I expect he is busy making love to some one else up in Scotland now." And then with a sudden rush of feeling which was quite uncontrollable, she cried out to herself, "Oh ! I do *hope* he isn't !"

Keston wheeled back to her on his bicycle. He had reverted to his former condition of silence. The desire to leave her was so dominant in him as to make itself felt tangibly.

But Drusilla had no intention of letting him go.

She told him so quite plainly.

"I know you want to get away," she said ; "you are so irritable as to be almost angry ; but I am always accustomed to get what I want, and as you wouldn't let me have my own way just now, you have to suffer for that."

A few yards further on she became personal in her remarks.

"I am afraid you are bad-tempered, Mr. Keston. Oh ! please don't be sulky. You have to amuse me, you know, and you can't do that if you are always in the dumps."

The certain conviction that he did not in the least know how to treat her and her nonsense was enjoyable up to a certain point, but after a little while it became irksome.

"This is real hard work and no mistake," she said to herself. "I expect when he gets in he will sit down and write out his resignation! And then Beth will scold me."

She resolved to dismiss him.

"I can see you are longing to get back to your work, so I won't keep you. If you will just get me some of those fascinating red berries, I will let you escape, Mr. Keston. Let me hold your bicycle." But he set this suggestion aside, of course, and putting the machine against the hedge he pulled and dragged at the branches above it till he had accomplished her desire.

Drusilla thanked him very sweetly, and promptly pinned the berries to her coat. The next moment she had stepped back and had whistled the dogs to heel, for there came the warning note of an approaching motor.

"We don't all want to be cut up into little bits, and this is a horrid corner." I always feel we shall run into something when I am in the car."

The motor, however, came round the corner almost leisurely, and as Drusilla glanced at it carelessly enough, her face suddenly grew hot with colour.

"My goodness!" she said under her breath.

The car ran a few yards and then stopped, and the man whom Drusilla had recognized got out and came hurriedly towards her. She gave him her hand with well-feigned indifference.

"How do you do, Lord Carlingford? You *are* you, aren't you? Please forgive me if I am just a little doubtful. Surely when we said good-bye two days ago you told me you were going to Scotland?"

Carlingford laughed.

"I thought so at the time, but I found that Scotland could wait; and as I had a chance of coming down into this neighbourhood, I decided to take it. I hope you are going to say that you're glad to see me, Miss Heronworth?"

"Oh, of course; that's the sort of thing people are always expected to say, isn't it?"

There was the usual pretty, laughing note in Drusilla's voice, but not quite the usual composure in her manner. She turned involuntarily to make some sort of introduction between Brian Keston and Lord Carlingford, but she found that Mr. Keston had mounted his bicycle and was already out of sight.

She noted, too, that Bob, the fox terrier, had galloped after him. It gave Drusilla the faintest suggestion of annoyance to realize that this particular dog should desert her so readily.

"You mustn't let me keep you standing here," said Lord Carlingford.

"Oh, I am just home. Is that your own car?" asked Drusilla.

He laughed and shook his head.

"No; I sent mine up North last week. This is a hired one, and rather a ramshackle affair. The people with whom I am staying haven't run to a motor just yet, so I had to do the best I could with the only available one in the neighbourhood."

With just the faintest touch of hesitation in her manner Drusilla said:

"Well, you will lunch with us, I hope? Then we can send you back in our motor; so please get rid of this one."

He obeyed her with alacrity.

"Only, you know," he said, when the car had been dis-

missed and they were walking on together, "I didn't really mean to burst in on you in this fashion. As a matter of fact, I hardly dared hope for the good luck of seeing you so soon, but I could not resist the temptation of taking a spin in this direction. Won't you let me carry your parcel?"

She laughed as she transferred the packet she carried to his charge.

"That looks as if it contained a small blanket," she said; "and there's nothing larger than postcards inside. I started out with the full intention of posting them and forgot all about it, you see. I made all sorts of promises to the Deravan children when I left them yesterday, and being a virtuous person, I began at once to keep up with my promises."

"The Deravan children are not the only ones who have promises made them," said the young man beside her quietly.

Drusilla laughed and blushed.

"How do you know," she asked, "that a postcard is not now on its way to Scotland?"

He looked at her suddenly and eagerly.

"Did you write?" he asked. "Have I missed your letter?"

She stopped once again to whistle the dogs. It was so ridiculous of her that she should feel so nervous.

"Well, I might have written," she said; "only as you forgot to give me your address, you see I couldn't."

She hurried on into a safer channel.

"Both, my sister, will be so pleased to meet you."

"Is she like you?" asked Lord Carlingford.

Drusilla shook her head.

"Oh, dear no. Beth is just everything that I am not! She is sweet, and good, and true, and beautiful; at least

she is beautiful to me. I have only a hazy remembrance of my mother ; and although Beth is not so very many years older, she has taken care of me ever since I can remember."

Lord Carlingford made no reply in words, but Drusilla felt his eyes upon her, felt something stir in her heart as those eyes rested upon her. This sudden coming was so unexpected, it swept her so surely away from that safe and tranquil condition which had been her heritage all through her young life. It meant, of course, that he had come to sue and yet to master, and Drusilla had never known a master till now !

CHAPTER II.

To find himself in such agreeable quarters was a new experience to Brian Keston. His old friend Lethbridge, who was senior partner of the legal firm which had the handling of Miss Heronworth's affairs had assured him he would find Bertha Heronworth an unusually nice woman. He had, nevertheless, gone down to Crowder Chase nervous and ill at ease; but he had been met so graciously that his awkwardness gave way perceptibly. Drusilla with her dainty clothes and her pretty, flighty manner, had been absent on his arrival. He had fallen almost at once into his groove of usefulness.

Miss Heronworth had led the young man first of all to those rooms which were placed at his own disposal, and then she had taken him into that portion of the house which henceforward would be his particular province. A bond of sympathy had been struck between them in discussing the treasures of the library, some of which had already arrived.

Keston quickly realized that he would be called upon to handle some wonderful and rare examples both in book and manuscript. It would seem that there were not only choicest specimens from the earliest monastic printing efforts of Italy, but equally fine examples of the early Dutch and German presses. The collection was immensely

rich in Caxtons and it contained besides histories of precious bindings dated back so far as the thirteenth century.

To Brian Keston the name of this celebrated library had conveyed naturally a great deal, but till his arrival at Crowder Chase he had not fully realized the number of almost priceless possessions which it would be his task to sort, arrange, and catalogue.

The knowledge awakened a certain amount of hesitation.

"I am almost afraid," he had said, "that I may not be quite capable of handling this big work, Miss Heronworth."

But Bertha Heronworth had smiled on him gently.

"You will be frank with me," she had answered, "and if you have any doubts, or if you want help, you will tell me so at once. From what I know of your training, however—I mean from what Mr. Lethbridge has told me of the work which you have been doing—I feel pretty well assured that you will not fail easily! Still, I understand your feelings, Mr. Keston, indeed I hardly realize myself as yet that I have been able to possess myself of all these wonderful things. I am afraid this little place is scarcely worthy of such a collection, but for the time being I must hoard it here."

But Keston had no fault to find with the rooms which had been built as an extension and designed especially for library purposes; indeed, to the young man the house though not sumptuous or grand, was a delightful one. The dominant note of homeliness, of real comfort appealed to him very directly and the rooms which had been given to him seemed almost too luxurious when contrasted with the shabby, dingy place in which he had lived for so many years.

With nothing, however, was he more charmed than

with the mistress of Crowder Chase. There was about Bertha Heronworth a sweetness and a serenity, and an unforced graciousness which won the young man's heart. Keston felt, too, that her welcome was absolutely sincere, and that he would find in her a friend as well as a fellow-worker.

Miss Heronworth did all in her power to confirm this delightful impression.

"I want you to feel quite at home, Mr. Keston," she had said. "My sister and I will be delighted if you will lunch and dine with us, but at the same time if this at any time interferes with your work we shall quite understand. And please remember you are going to let me help you whenever or wherever I can be of use. Books have been my delight ever since I can remember anything."

You are rich already," Brian Keston had said as he had walked round the library and had glanced at the contents of the shelves.

But Miss Heronworth had shaken her head.

"We have very little that is rare here, save, perhaps, these old Bibles; in this case you will find a copy in very fine preservation of the first English Bible, the Coverdale, 1535. My father, I think, would have taken up books as his hobby in real earnest had he lived; as it was he started buying first editions, and these, of course, will become more valuable as time passes."

Though he fell quickly into the duties required of him a sense of unreality always pressed on Brian Keston whenever he was alone in the charming sitting-room which had been allotted to him, and on this morning after he had bicycled away from Drusilla he stood a moment looking about him with a nervous feeling which was almost irritation.

"Lethbridge was right," he said to himself with that

touch of grimness which circumstances had worked into his voice and manner. "I am in clover, but whether I am wise to do this sort of thing time will show. I am not so sure that I shouldn't have been better off if I had stayed in the old groove. I believe I am hard; and I ought to have had all nonsense knocked out of me, still these kind of things—" he glanced at the chairs, the comfortable couch, the large handsome writing-table and equally handsome curtains of the window and shrugged his shoulders—"have no real place in a life like mine!"

Only a month before he had been serving behind the counter in an old book-shop in a north-country town. His life had been lived in and about that book-shop for several years; he had slept in a shabby kind of attic, he had eaten in an underground apartment. Nothing but enthusiasm for the work, nothing but that overpowering interest, that kind of obsession which came to him little by little for the books, the wondrous silent revelations of other men's brains, would have kept him so long in that little shabby shop in that unimportant town but chance had put a certain kind of power in his hands. The man whom he had served was old and was sick. Little by little the business had been left entirely in Keston's care and he had proved a splendid administrator. He had bought and sold on his own initiative and the little shop had prospered. Probably if death had not come to end the old owner's sufferings Keston would have stayed on indefinitely; but the relatives had resolved to sell the business and the young man found himself practically adrift after fifteen years' hard labour and real loyalty. He had, not, it is true, left the old shop immediately, but had agreed to remain on till the business had changed hands and it was in this interval that he had made application for possible recommendation to Mr. Lettbridge, the

one and only person in the world whom he called friend, or who took any interest in him.

The two men had dined in London the night before Keston's arrival at Crowder Chase.

"It is a real satisfaction to me to bring you and Miss Heronworth together," Stephen Lethbridge had said. "There are few people for whom I have the respect and admiration that I have for Bertha Heronworth. I suppose if all her property were realized she would be worth every penny of two millions, yet she is the most modest, the simplest, the kindest and most charitable creature in the world. She owns the largest share of the Heronworth shipbuilding firm up North."

Mr. Lethbridge had said nothing about the younger Miss Heronworth, but this did not surprise Keston. Drusilla did not appear to him to be a person who would be of importance to anybody but herself, and probably her sister. She was the kind of flighty, frivolous, pretty creature whose mission it was to dazzle, but who could make no claim upon the intelligence or real sympathies of those about her; so he lightly dismissed the girl at first, but gradually he was beginning to think differently. Drusilla had a trick of making strange claims, indeed of exacting not merely attention but after-thought. She was very prominently in his mind now as he stood musing with a frown on his brow. He was thinking of her, not as she had been just before he had left her, but as she had looked when they had stood at the door of the cottage hospital, and she had entreated so earnestly to be allowed to see Phil Rogers. There had been vouchsafed to him then something more than a glimpse of a nature which could possess depths of emotional feeling strangely at variance with her favourite flippancy. Assuredly she was not to be judged casually. As he stood frowning and musing,

Bob, the fox terrier, sat at his feet and looked up at him. Keston had hardly realized that the dog had followed him, and as he stooped to greet the animal his face took on a different expression. Bob was evidently determined to be very friendly. He wagged his tail, and he sneezed, and he stretched himself, and he stood up on his hind legs, and leaned affectionately against the young man, and as he caressed the smooth head of the dog and responded to this affectionate greeting there came back to Brian Keston's remembrance visions of days long before, when he had lived in just such an atmosphere as this, and had possessed just such a dog as Bob for his constant companion and friend. It was long since memory had swept him back so far; he never encouraged himself to dwell on things which had happened when he had been a boy, for far away as those things were, they made the groundwork for that bitterness which had done its best to spoil a fine nature.

Drusilla missed Mr. Keston when they were seated at luncheon. She still wore her hat, but had discarded her thick coat and in the front of her silk blouse she had pinned the bunch of red berries which Brian Keston had picked for her with so much difficulty.

Lord Carlingford proved a most agreeable acquisition to the small luncheon party. Miss Heronworth had expressed real pleasure at meeting him; nevertheless, there was a little pang in her heart as she glanced now and again at the two young people, who laughed and talked so lightly one to another.

Drusilla's beauty almost startled her to-day, and though she felt that she ought to have been prepared for the coming of this stranger she confessed a little sorrowfully that she would have been glad if Drusilla could have re-

mained her own a little longer ; moreover, there was a shadow hovering over the unconscious happiness of these two and when she looked ahead Bertha Heronworth shivered involuntarily. Yet, this lover who came so boldly, with his story written so legibly in his eyes, was one to make the heart of any young woman proud. Lord Carlingford sprang from a splendid race, it was little wonder that any girl should see in him the stuff that makes a hero.

She left them to themselves after luncheon ; and Drusilla took him to all her favourite haunts. She made him wait for her while she paid the promised visit to Mrs. Casson. When she had given orders that the motor should be ready, and they were sauntering back to the house, she suddenly uttered an exclamation :

“ Oh, I have lost my berries—my dear little red berries ! ”

“ And, looking back, she saw the berries lying on the ground. Before she could reach them, Carlingford had picked them up.

“ The stem is broken,” he said ; “ you can’t wear them. May I keep them ? ”

She shook her head.”

“ No. I can’t give them away, because they were a gift to me.”

His face clouded ; and laughingly she explained :

“ Mr. Keston, who was with me when you met me to-day, picked those berries expressly for me. So you see I can’t give them to you.”

Lord Carlingford laughed at her ; then he flung the berries on the ground, and crushed them under his heel.

The girl looked at him, startled, half frightened, and then indignant.

That was cruel,” she said, under her breath.

“ And I am cruel,” he answered. “ It is just as well that you should know me as I really am.”

"You are very kind," said Drusilla a trifle coldly; "but why is it necessary that I should know you better than I know you now?"

He laughed again, and once again commanded her eyes to his.

"Why, that is a foolish question, Drusilla," he said; "seeing that I am here because I am yours—because you belong to me."

She grew hot and then she felt cold, and the colour faded utterly out of her face.

"Please don't talk nonsense," she said. "If you are here, you alone know why you have come. I gave you no invitation."

He bit his lip, and suddenly put his hand out and laid it on her arm, but she drew back quickly, so quickly that she slipped from under his touch.

"Are you sure that you won't have some tea before you go?" she asked. "By the way, how far have you to go? We know most of the people staying about here."

"I'm not staying with friends," he said quietly. "I am putting up at the inn in East Wadley."

Drusilla said: "I am sorry," with a curious inflection in her voice.

"Sorry!" Carlingford echoed; "but why? Of course, you knew I should follow you."

At this she turned, and he saw her lips were quivering.

"Indeed and indeed you are wrong! I never imagined such a thing. How could I? We only met a week ago."

"A week!" the young man laughed. "Time means nothing; it is fate that counts. Do you know that it was by the merest chance I turned up at Bráske? When Lady Deravan wrote to me I had every intention of being a good many hundred miles away from her and the people she had staying with her; but

my uncle in Dumfriesshire cracked up suddenly, as you know, and, finding myself out for a week, I wired to know if I could go to Braske. The moment I arrived Lady Deravan got hold of me and began talking about you. She tried to describe you, which isn't easy, and then she told me to take care of myself. She said, 'Drusilla Heronworth is really an awfully sweet girl, but she hasn't got one little bit of heart. She is a fearful flirt!' Well, when I saw you I realized that Lady Deravan had made a mistake, not when she said you were a flirt, but when she said you had no heart: for you *have* a heart, Drusilla, and that heart is going to belong to me. Don't you see," the man said almost fiercely, "you've got me body and soul too! I've played at this sort of game lots of times, Drusilla, but I never, never knew the real thing till now. Look here," he broke off with a little laugh: "I sound as if I were bullying you, but I only want you to feel, to know, how much in earnest I am. I thought you saw how it was with me all last week. Why, when we said 'Good-bye' at Braske I simply didn't know what to do with myself."

Her silence, the whiteness of her face, touched him.

"I say, dearest," he said, "have I frightened you?"

And now the tenderness in his voice brought the colour rushing back to her face and the tears to her eyes.

"I did not understand," she said falteringly, "yet I suppose it must have been my fault. Lots and lots of times Bertha has tried to make me realize that I am grown up, and must not talk nonsense. If I had been like the others——"

"If you had been like the others," said Carlingford, with conviction, "I shouldn't be here to-day."

They had moved on slowly, and were now in view of the house, where the motor-car was drawn up waiting.

With a delightful and irresistible gesture the young man held out his hand.

"Aren't you going to say you are a *little* sorry for me?" he whispered. "I am staying at a wretched little inn. I am going to have a long, dreary evening. I've only got my thoughts of you to keep me company."

"Why *did* you come?" asked Drusilla nervously. "Don't you see that you give me such a sense of responsibility? I want to be kind; but I don't know you. I—I don't know myself."

Bertha Heronworth came down the steps slowly, and advanced to meet them. Her coming brought both relief and a little pang to Drusilla. The thought of his loneliness, the thought of the long, dull evening of which he had just spoken, the knowledge that he had set everything aside just to be near her, worked upon that facile sympathy of hers, moved her, made a direct appeal to her.

Always ready to respond to impulse, now she committed herself almost unconsciously.

"Bertha, what do you think?" she called. "Lord Carlingford is not staying with friends: he is putting up at that wretched little inn at East Wadley. Won't you persuade him to come back and dine with us?"

"It will give me very great pleasure," said Miss Heronworth.

And Lord Carlingford accepted the invitation with alacrity.

As he took temporary farewell of them his hand closed firmly over Drusilla's.

"Dearest!" he said in a whisper. And at the word, at the touch, she flamed into red-hot life, into a veritable tumult of feeling, none of which she was capable of analyzing or comprehending.

The car whisked away ; the sisters turned indoors together ; Bertha held a telegram in her hand. It would have been natural to have spoken about the young man who had just left them, but she did not do so ; instead, she held out the telegram to her sister.

" I am afraid you will be vexed, darling," she said ; " this is from Aunt Edith. She has wired saying she wants to come here now for a few days instead of next week, and will be down in time for dinner this evening. Uncle Edmund and Connie, of course, are coming too."

" What a bore ! " said Drusilla. But she spoke vaguely, as though she were separated from all that was ordinary and conventional. By degrees, however, as they remained in the hall chatting about the guests who were coming, Drusilla became roused.

" I shall love to see dear old Uncle Edmund and Connie: They are always a joy ; but prepare yourself, Beth," she said, with a laugh, " I fully expect Aunt Edith has chosen to come here now on purpose to gird at you because you have bought this library. It will be rather a change if she finds fault with *you* instead of me. It is queer, isn't it—" said Drusilla thoughtfully—" how disagreeable she always is with me, and yet I give you my word I work awfully hard to make her like me? Most people get to like me very quickly. Some," she added to herself with a touch of humour and dismay mingled, " too quickly, but I can't do anything with Aunt Edith."

" Oh, you imagine this, dearest," Bertha Heronworth said very quickly, but the trouble that had been brooding in her mind the last hour or so found expression on her face.

" She will, of course, pick all sorts of holes in Mr. Keston," Drusilla chatted on. " Depend upon it, Bertha,

you will now find that you have done a dreadful thing in engaging a strange young man to be your librarian."

"Let us hope things won't be quite so bad," said Bertha, with a faint smile.

She began to move away slowly, as she spoke, and Drusilla stretched out her hand and drew her back.

"Don't go," she said, "I want you." She sighed a little. "I thought we were going to have such a heavenly time together, and now this is all spoilt. . . . Beth, can't we put off the people who are coming next week? . . . I know we must put up with Aunt Edith; but oh! I do so badly want a quiet little time with you all to myself. Why can't people leave us alone?" Drusilla asked impatiently.

Bertha Heronworth's heart was beating a little uncertainly as she stood holding her sister's hand. At another time she would have questioned, but something kept her silent now—a sense of scarcely defined sadness—and with it the knowledge that this sudden development in Drusilla's life must be fraught for herself with so much that would be difficult, even anxious.

Suddenly Drusilla lifted her sister's hand to her lips and kissed it.

"Were you surprised to see Lord Carlingford?" she asked.

"Very," answered Bertha. Then gallantly she added: "He is very handsome, Drusilla; altogether delightful."

"Yes, isn't he?" said Drusilla warmly. "They tell me all the women are in love with him. I am afraid he is a little bit of a flirt, you know, Beth. Still, I must confess he is really nice and amusing too. Aunt Edith will love him."

She picked up her coat that she had tossed off.

"I suppose I ought to go and meet them at the station, eh?" she queried.

"Oh, no, dearest. They will come so late. And that reminds me I must give orders that dinner must be put back." Miss Heronworth moved away to find the housekeeper, and as she did so she glanced at her sister.

"Oh, Drusilla, you have lost that lovely bunch of berries. They made such a pretty bit of colour, and looked so sweet in that white blouse."

"Ah!"

Like a flash Drusilla was across the hall and out of the house. The berries, crushed and shapeless, were lying where he had trodden them.

Drusilla picked them up tenderly.

"I would not have had Mr. Keston know about this for all I am worth," she said to herself, and she walked back to the house thoughtfully.

CHAPTER III.

WHEN Lord Carlingford came back at dinner-time, he found Drusilla standing in front of the fireplace in the hall reading some letters.

The young man apologized for being early.

"But that car of yours is a ripper," he said; "we seemed to fly here."

"You are not early; it is we who are late. You have been brought here on false pretences, Lord Carlingford. You are *not* going to have a pleasant evening; it is just as well to prepare you."

"I have all I want to make me happy," the young man answered, as he stood in front of the fireplace beside her.

But she did not blush, she only laughed.

"I begin to think you are one of those rarely endowed individuals who are satisfied with little."

Then Drusilla asked him a question:

"Have you many relatives?"

He nodded his head.

"Heaps. Some of them fairly decent, too, as relations go. What's the matter? Has some one been vexing you?"

"A family has descended on us, and just when we were going to have such a lovely evening all by ourselves!"

Carlingford turned.

"Drusilla!" he breathed; then hurriedly: "But we shall have a whole lifetime of evenings spent by our two selves."

At this she laughed outright.

"Please don't let us talk so foolishly. It is very sweet of you to care about me so much, but really I don't want to lose my own happy life just yet awhile. Now you have seen Beth, and so you can easily understand how beautiful home is to me because of her. And . . . and, oh! well, *please* don't let anyone, especially Aunt Edith, suppose anything! We are good friends, you and I, *old* friends of just a week's acquaintance, but, really, I beg you will believe I am in earnest when I"

But he silenced the words on her lips.

"I love you," he whispered, and he moved for an instant closer to her. "You talk of friendship and patience, but I am on fire, Drusilla, because I love you—*because I love you.*"

"Beth is coming!" Drusilla said under her voice. She took her hand from his and drew the long, loose, white glove over it quickly. "Beth . . . Lord Carlingford is in love with my motor—won't you let him take you for a trip somewhere to-morrow? I have been preparing him for a very dull and family evening."

Bertha smiled faintly as she addressed the young man:

"I am only sorry you will not meet our uncle, Edmund Lingfield; he is not well enough to come down to dinner. Drusilla," Bertha added, "I feel so grieved about him, he looks so terribly ill."

"Can I go and see him? Why *did* Aunt Edith make him take this long journey?" Drusilla asked in one breath.

"You shall see him to-morrow. From what Aunt Edith tells me, it seems he was very anxious to come here; he has wanted to see us for some time."

Drusilla looked at Lord Carlingford.

"I was abusing relations just now, but I should have made two exceptions—dear Uncle Edmund is the one person I love in all the world after Beth, except, perhaps Connie, his daughter." She stood tapping her fan against her hand, then she moved away with a smile as Brian Keston, wearing a shy, awkward air, came out of the shadows into the glow of the lamps. He had dressed for dinner unwillingly, but Miss Heronworth had asked him to dine in such a charming manner he had not found it possible to refuse.

Drusilla forgot his churlishness of the morning; she enticed him to sit down and talk.

"Did your ears burn this afternoon late? No? Well, then there must be something wrong! I went to see poor Mrs. Rogers, and she could talk of nothing else but you and your goodness to her poor boy."

"Rogers is better to-night," Mr. Keston said, in his awkward way.

Drusilla nodded her head.

"Yes, I know and I am so glad!" The next moment she said: "I have a bone to pick with you, Mr. Keston! You have stolen my Bob's heart away. He never deserted me till you came. But perhaps it is only fair treatment, for I left him here for nearly two months this summer. You are fond of dogs?"

He answered "Yes;" just that, nothing more or less.

Drusilla was piqued and amused too. From the first she had felt the strength of this quiet, uncommunicative man; he had a personality. His thin, clean-shaven face, his tall figure, his well-shaped hands made atonement for his awkwardness; even for his lack of amiability.

"I suppose Beth can make him talk, but if I start books I am undone! What curious eyes he has; they have

an untamed expression. I wonder what he will do if Aunt Edith takes him in hand ? ”

Mrs. Lingfield came on the scene at that moment, followed by her step-daughter, an ordinary-looking young woman, with plaintive eyes which had humour in them. She and Drusilla kissed one another with real affection.

“ Dear Connie, you will scarcely believe it, but I went up early to dress on purpose to be down here when you all arrived and I fell asleep ! And so I am punished, for I am longing to see your father. Is he really ill ? ”

Brian Keston stood in the background. Against his inclination he found himself watching Drusilla Heronworth. Her every movement had a new charm in it. She reminded him of so many different things, all bewildering, all beautiful.

Miss Heronworth came to him as he stood apart.

“ I am so sorry my uncle cannot dine with us,” she said, “ he is too much fatigued ; but I hope you will meet to-morrow.”

Bertha looked rather wan, as though she were tired.

“ You will take in my aunt, I want to present you to her. Drusilla, you two girls must go in together.”

Mrs. Lingfield chose to be unusually amiable to the young man brought up to her, and, later, as she sailed into the dining-room on the arm of Mr. Keston, she vouchsafed the information that once, many years ago, she had known some people bearing the same name as his own.

“ I lost sight of them when my husband and I went to live abroad, and I have so often wondered what became of Rosalie Keston ; she was a very pretty woman.”

“ My mother’s name was Rosalie,” Brian said, but he spoke quietly, almost uninterestedly.

“ A strange coincidence.” Mrs. Lingfield turned her

well-organized smile on the young man. "And what was your father's name? It would be odd if you should happen to be my old friend's son, Mr. Keston."

"My father was Richard Keston, at one time a fairly well-known literary man; he died comparatively young."

Mrs. Lingfield repeated the name and then uttered an exclamation.

"But of course, how foolish of me not to remember! Richard Keston, why my husband was one of his greatest admirers! And he died young! And your mother?"

"My mother married again many years ago."

Mrs. Lingfield said, "How interesting!" and meant what she said.

"It would give me so much pleasure to meet your dear mother again," she said graciously.

But the information she naturally expected was not forthcoming.

"No doubt an excellent young man, but absolutely devoid of manners," Mrs. Lingfield said to herself, and for the remainder of the dinner she talked to Lord Carlingford. But while she chatted, her mind was working in an old channel, recalling old things, and all at once there came to her a remembrance which explained much that Brian Keston had left unsaid. Just as she was rising from the table she turned again to him.

"Forgive me for reminding you of sad things, but was it true that your father was involved in that Spanrith smash? I remember he was a very great friend of George Spanrith, and we always feared he might have suffered as so many others did."

"He lost every farthing he had in the world," Brian Keston said quietly; "it was that which killed him."

"Poor fellow!" said Mrs. Lingfield with a sigh; "it was

a terrible business." She moved away and passed out into the drawing-room. Bertha Heronworth lingered to introduce the two men, but Keston was only too glad to escape to his own room, and Lord Carlingford was left to sit and smoke alone.

In the drawing-room Connie Lingfield talked about him frankly.

"He is awfully handsome, Drusilla!"

"Yes, isn't he? And he wears such *nice* clothes," said Drusilla in her laziest fashion, "for which no doubt he never pays."

Connie laughed.

"He looks as if he could make anyone pay who owed him anything! Drusilla, he has a temper!"

"Who hasn't?"

Mother has only come here now because she heard a rumour that he was madly in love with you, and she felt she must know what was going to happen!"

At this Drusilla changed colour.

"I don't know what Aunt Edith has heard, or who can have been telling her things about me. It is certainly a little premature to marry me to a man I have only known one short week."

It was so unusual for Drusilla to speak coldly that her cousin opened her rather engaging eyes.

"You shan't marry anyone if you don't want to," she said soothingly.

And Drusilla laughed, for it struck her that this was rather the reverse of the actual case.

"Come over here," she said, leading the way to the piano. "Lord Carlingford shall sing to us." When they were well out of earshot, she said to Miss Lingfield: "Connie, darling, you won't let Aunt Edith worry me about this, will you? Really, it is *too* absurd!"

And Connie's eyes now twinkled.

"Well, I don't know. I am not given to jumping at conclusions as mother does as a general rule, still, you must confess, Drusilla, circumstances are going a long way to prove her case. She literally gasped when she heard he was coming to dinner. Of course, he must have intentions of some sort, else why should he be down here?"

Drusilla sat down on the music-stool.

"Oh! Connie," she said, "do be an angel and marry him yourself! You can't think how much obliged I should be to you."

"And how grateful Lord Carlingford would be! I must think it over. But, softly, here he comes! I suppose you don't want me to propose now right away."

Drusilla pinched her cousin and then looked at the man approaching with mischief in her eyes.

"Lord Carlingford . . . Miss Lingfield has something to ask you!"

The other girl started and blushed in confusion, but quickly recovered herself.

"We want you to sing to us," she said a little breathlessly; "please do."

CHAPTER IV.

LORD CARLINGFORD possessed, it appeared, quite a pretty musical talent. Drusilla threw herself into a low chair close to the piano and gave herself up to real enjoyment. She did not hear Connie Lingfield steal away after the second song to pay a visit to her father, but lay back with closed eyes, dreamily happy.

Mrs. Lingfield and Bertha sat at the other side of the room.

Drusilla's prophecy had been fulfilled. Assuredly Mrs. Lingfield did not approve of the purchase of the celebrated Caroby library, and she allowed this to be clearly understood. But then she rarely approved of what her niece did and had always grudged Bertha her splendid inheritance. Not that she herself lacked for anything; indeed, her share of the Heronworth wealth was by no means inconsiderable; but Bertha's father had been her elder brother and a very clever man, with the result that at his death the fine inheritance his father had left him had become a very large fortune. Mrs. Lingfield was not merely jealous; it had long since become a favourite occupation with her to criticize all that Bertha did. The last time she had been on a visit to Crowder Chase she had preached a sermon against her niece's simple home and simple ways. This time her text was different. As long

however, as she confined her remarks to the subject of the library Miss Heronworth was not uneasy; it was when her aunt began to discuss Drusilla and the young man who was singing tender love songs in a whisper that Bertha Heronworth's heart grew a little cold.

Mrs. Lingfield had to allow grudgingly that Drusilla had not done badly, although, of course, there were blemishes to be found even in Lord Carlingford.

"He is the very image of his father," she observed, as she opened a reticule and took out some ridiculous piece of work which she called "embroidery." "And you know what sort of a man Lord Southborne is! When I was a girl everybody expected that he was going to be *the* man of the day, but he has ended by being a brilliant failure. And then his extravagance! I hear that this boy has already a few horses in training at Newmarket."

Bertha looked at her aunt thoughtfully. Mrs. Lingfield was what would be called a sweet-looking woman of the Madonna type. Though she was no longer young, she had abundant hair only just sprinkled with grey. Dress with her was a passion, and her gowns inclined to the picturesque; her jewels were quite beautiful. There was nothing peevish or uncharitable about her expression; she was one of those women whom people enthusiastically decide must be a delightful mother; yet she had never had a child, and the real instinct of maternity which was so largely a part of Bertha Heronworth's nature had no place with her at all.

"You are going just a little too fast, Aunt Edith," the younger woman said, unable to repress the coldness in her voice. "Lord Carlingford is dining here just by chance. Drusilla met him for the first time last week when she was staying with the Deravans at Braske."

Mrs. Lingfield smiled.

"You see, my dear," she said, "I know a little bit about these sort of things. As a matter of fact, I heard that he was paying particular attention to Drusilla at Braske; that was one reason why I came here to-day. Of course, it is a very important matter, and I thought you might like to talk it over with me. The position is excellent; at the same time one has to be careful."

"Yes," said Bertha, with a catch in her voice and a significant half-glance across the room.

It troubled her that such a delicate subject should be discussed by her aunt, and more particularly at this moment.

"It is, of course, well known that Drusilla will be rich," pursued Mrs. Lingfield, quite impervious to the hint conveyed in Bertha's manner. "I mean most people regard Drusilla as a great catch. And though I have never really understood how much exactly poor George left her, she is naturally what might be called a very rich girl."

Bertha Heronworth rose with a quick sigh. She pushed back her chair and walked in her halting fashion across the room towards those two at the piano. Her gowns in the evening were usually black; to-night she wore velvet with a beautiful wide collar of old lace, and as Carlingford glanced up and saw her coming, he said to her sister:

"How charming Miss Heronworth looks! it is such a relief to see a woman dressed as she dresses. I adore the way she does her hair."

"Don't you like the way I do mine?" asked the girl in a sleepy voice.

And he answered her truthfully:

"I don't know how you do your hair. I never know what you wear, I only know that you are lovely; amazingly, maddeningly lovely."

The girl turned and sat upright in her chair.

"Bertha, wasn't that an enchanting song?"

"I want to hear it again," said Bertha Heronworth.

And her sister knew by the tone in her voice that she was not in her customary serene humour.

"Sing," she said to the young man, "sing all you know. Bertha will listen and I will go to sleep."

Lord Carlingford shut down the piano.

"That is a hint," he said, and he glanced at the clock. "Half-past ten. Miss Heronworth, I feel ashamed; I have already trespassed on your kindness far too much to-day."

"You have served a very useful purpose," said Drusilla, getting up out of the chair reluctantly; "no one goes in that motor-car except when I am at home, and it was getting rusty for want of use. While you are down here do please make your own arrangements with Wilkins, the chauffeur. I am afraid he has a very half-hearted opinion of me; but the fact is," Drusilla said, "I'm not really a motorist at all! Tearing wildly through the country doesn't give me the slightest pleasure. Indeed, to me there is a sort of arrogance, a horrible selfishness, attached to a motor-car. I wasn't happy till I had one, and that dear, sweet angel always gives me what I want; but now I am not at all sure that our old coachman isn't right, and that there is not more dignity and luxury and comfort in an old-fashioned horse-carriage. Everybody is in such a hurry nowadays," said Drusilla. "Why do people want to be in a hurry?"

"Is there to be no music for me?" inquired Bertha, as the young man stood before her and held out his hand to say "Good-bye."

"I really think I must go now, but I will come to-morrow if you will let me."

Drusilla had moved away; she was walking across the room towards her aunt.

"I want to speak to you alone," Carlingford said to Miss Heronworth. "May I come to-morrow?"

He was looking at her intently, and it seemed to him that her small face had a curious yearning in its expression; a look strangely suggestive of pain. There was just a little pause, and then Miss Heronworth said:

"You will find me here all the morning, Lord Carlingford."

He bent and kissed her hand. He knew she was young, that the semblance of maturity about her came from character, from circumstances alone, yet in this moment she stood to him in the light of Drusilla's mother.

He paused to say a few charming words to Mrs. Lingfield, but he had not expected to take his farewell of Drusilla in the presence of the others. The girl, however, elected to dismiss him casually.

"Good night," she said. "I heard you making an assignation with Bertha to-morrow; but, of course, we shan't expect you. You are one of those erratic kind of people who are here to-day and gone the next, and Heaven knows where you will be the day after that!"

"I think you will see me," said Carlingford, and then clasping her hand very firmly, he bent and kissed her on the brow.

Mrs. Lingfield gasped as he went out of the room.

"Dear me!" she said. "What queer manners you young people have nowadays! Bertha, if you don't mind, I shall go upstairs. I suppose Connie is not coming down again; the air here always makes me very drowsy! My reel of silk has fallen close to your foot; do you mind picking it up?"

Bertha Heronworth obeyed her and wound the long stretch of silk carefully round the reel. She was not looking at her sister, yet she was perfectly conscious of all

that Drusilla did. She had heard the little sigh which escaped Drusilla, and she had seen the girl take her lace handkerchief and rub her brow almost fiercely. She felt rather than saw with what an effort Drusilla said, "Good night," to her aunt, and as soon as she had escorted Mrs. Lingfield up the stairs to her room Bertha limped back again to the drawing-room. She went up to Drusilla, who was standing in front of the fire, looking into it with a strange expression.

"Dearest, my dearest," she said. "Do you care for this man. Oh! Drusilla, I *must* know, he is coming to me to-morrow; he is coming to ask me to give you to him, and it is you who must answer."

Drusilla turned to her sister, her lips were quivering.

"Are you in such a hurry to get rid of me?" she said; then her voice broke: "I don't know—I don't *know*, Beth. I want him to be just like everybody else in my life, but he forces me to see that he is different. It was like that the first hour we met; there is something strong about him, something which fascinates me. I want him when he is not here, and yet when we are together I feel as if I almost hated him. Oh! I wish he hadn't come! I did so long to be alone with you a little while, I wanted to talk to you about him. I am not sure of myself, Bertha; and I must be sure of myself, mustn't I?"

Bertha Heronworth sat down and Drusilla fell on her knees beside her sister.

"Won't you say all this to him to-morrow? won't you tell him just exactly what I have said?" she pleaded. "He says time means nothing, but oh! it does, it does! And I want time. I never wanted anything so much as time to think things over. You see, you have always done the thinking for me," said Drusilla, "so you must decide now." She laughed as she spoke, and sat

back on her heels regarding her sister half shyly, half amusedly.

"You shall have time," Bertha said after a little pause ; "but I don't really believe you want it." She caught her breath a little as she spoke, then she kissed Drusilla many times and then she got up. "At any rate," she said, "I am glad Uncle Edmund is here. I shall be able to talk over everything with him."

"Uncle Edmund!" repeated Drusilla ; "but why ? what has he to do with me ?"

"He is your trustee," said Bertha. She spoke constrainedly : "Co-trustee with me. He must be told. I—I must consult with him."

"You talk as if I were a lease of a house," said Drusilla.

She was smiling again ; all her sunniness had come back to her ; in fact, she laughed outright, and as her sister looked at her she said :

"Wasn't Aunt Edith shocked ? I believe he kissed me on purpose to make her jump. What *has* she been telling you about him ? I know he is supposed to be a bold, bad man."

"He is certainly bold," Bertha said, with a faint smile ; "but now, dearest, you ought to go to bed. You looked awfully tired when we were at dinner, so white that I thought you were ill, and you have so much to excite you. I will come and say 'Good night' when you are in bed."

"Bertha," said the younger girl, as she put her arms round her sister, "I do wish we could be little children all over again . . . one is never responsible for anything when one is a child. Do you remember how I used to worry you to let me be grown up ? Now, I should like to be a little baby, sleeping all day long in a bassinette. Come soon, darling," said Drusilla, as she picked up her fan

and gloves and handkerchief, "or else I won't promise to keep awake."

Left by herself, Bertha Heronworth stood a long time without moving; then she limped to her writing-table.

She felt cold, and there was a cheerless feeling in the air. She could hear Durning, the butler, moving about in the hall beyond, waiting to turn out the lights. Taking up a pen she wrote hurriedly :

"DEAR UNCLE EDMUND,—

"I hope so much you will be better in the morning. I want to have a little chat with you on a most important matter. It is something which concerns Drusilla—in fact, it has to do with her marriage. I suppose I ought to have been prepared for this, but, indeed, it has taken me by surprise. Drusilla is so young, and somehow I have never thought about what I should do in circumstances like these. . . . I hope you will be able to relieve my mind of a great sense of trouble and anxiety. I know that you will always do what is right, but oh ! dear Uncle Edmund, I pray with all my heart that what we feel is the right and just course to take will work out for the happiness of my dear, dear child."

She scribbled this note, scarcely seeing the words inscribed for the mist of tears which clouded her eyes. Indeed, she had to pause a little while before folding the letter and addressing the envelope. Then she went to the door and called in the butler.

"Durning," she said, "this is a note which must be given to Mr. Lingfield early in the morning. Will you take it yourself or give it to his man ? I understand he has brought a new valet this time."

"I'll give it myself, miss," Durning said. "Shall I shut up now, miss?"

Miss Heronworth said "Yes," and bade the butler "Good night" in her usual gentle way; then went slowly up the stairs to Drusilla's room. It was an old custom with her to go the last thing to see that all was well with Drusilla; to-night it cost Bertha Heronworth a great effort to bring a smile to her lips and drive the trouble from her eyes, and she paused a long while at the girl's door before entering.

Then when she turned the handle, she found all in silence. Drusilla was already asleep. It was evident she had tried to wait for Bertha's coming, for the light was still on and a book lay on the counterpane, but she was thoroughly tired, and sleep had stolen on her unawares.

Bertha Heronworth would not kiss her for fear of rousing her. Her lips trembled and the tears came again as she moved softly away.

"If only she need never know!" she said to herself.

CHAPTER V.

BRIAN KESTON was always up early, and, as a rule, had done a vast amount of work before breakfast. He made no change in this rule at Crowder Chase, although contact with luxury awakened in him certain sensations which had lain dormant for years. There had, indeed, been nothing to soften the ugliness of material life up in that little northern town book-shop, and now he was conscious in a vaguely resentful way of a certain uncouthness in himself, an awkwardness which he had never realized before. And yet he was not absolutely sure that the life he had lived would not prove more sympathetic to him in the long run than his present life promised to be. He did not want a smooth path. His nature craved to struggle with and conquer difficulties. A dream with him had always been to travel, to find the world in untrodden places, and this restless desire held him now as keenly as ever. It was only when he was alone among the packing-cases in the library, handling with wonder their marvellous contents that he drifted into a mood that was almost one of satisfaction. Indeed, the work was so congenial, so fraught with amazement and delight, he lost count of time. He forgot everything.

When Keston went to breakfast, the morning following the arrival of the Lingfields, he found a letter which had been forwarded on to him from the old shop. Just

glancing at it, he put it on one side ; he knew its contents. His mother only wrote to him when she had need of him ; and really, considering that she was the wife of a fairly rich man, it was surprising how often she turned to her son to ask for financial assistance. Later, when he was smoking his pipe, standing with his back to the fire, Keston took up this letter. As usual it related a story of petty annoyance.

A grim little smile curled the lips of the man who read it. It was amusing in a sense to note with what dexterity his mother invented new explanations for her habitual extravagance. Sometimes he had been asked to help her so that she might help one of her family ; sometimes the plea was that she had such enormous demands for charity on her private purse she was left without a penny ; then apparently a time of depression would have necessitated economy on her husband's part.

Lately, she had used her two children—Keston's step-sisters—as an excuse for worrying him. The present letter gave a long and rambling account of the ill-behaviour of a certain governess, whose abrupt departure had seemingly exhausted Lady Draycott's financial resources.

Keston flicked the letter from him with a smile and a sigh. By practising the most rigid self-denial he had in the last few years managed to scrape together a little money, but his mother's constant demands, though they did not run to big sums, had made such inroads on this small capital that, together with the expenses incidental to his taking up his present post, he was left with very little in hand.

There were various reasons why Keston would have been glad to have been able to keep his mother in ignorance of his present employment. In particular, he had a

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nervous dread lest Lady Draycott should take it into her head to pay a flying visit to Crowder Chase. She had once, long ago, gone to see him in the North, and had never repeated the experience, but there was a wide difference between that shabby little shop and the place where he was now.

"And what mother could not possibly grasp," he said to himself, "is the fact that I am just as much a servant here as I was there."

It was this straightforwardness, this uncompromising truthfulness of his, which had put a barrier between his mother and himself from the beginning; and, as time had rolled on, and her marriage (which had followed so quickly on her widowhood) had put their lives asunder, the separation between them had become almost absolute.

He smoked his pipe to the end, pondering and frowning a little, whilst Bob stretched himself in slumber on the hearthrug, and then, with the chiming of the clock, Keston put away his thoughts and went back to his work.

The morning was fairly advanced when there came a tap at the library door, and he turned, to greet, as he supposed, Miss Heronworth, who had joined him each morning for a little while at this hour. It was, however, the younger sister who appeared.

"Good-morning," said Drusilla. "May I come in and sit here a little while? I shan't be the least bit of a bother, but I do want to know something about what is going on."

"It is very dusty," said Keston, in his stiff, awkward way; "you will spoil your dress."

But Drusilla had caught the folds of her blue-serge gown closely about her revealing two enchantingly pretty feet.

"I see a chair," she said, "and it isn't very dusty."

Really, Mr. Keston, I promise you I will get out of your way the moment you ask me "

Keston was very much annoyed at Drusilla's arrival. She was composed of such disturbing elements, it was impossible to concentrate his attention when she was sitting there, the embodiment of irresponsibility.

" You know, I felt I had to come here," said Drusilla, after a little pause, in which she had studied him attentively. " She told herself that she liked his features and she liked his voice. He had on a long linen coat to protect his clothes from the dust, and he managed to appear attractive even in this very trying garment.

" You look," said the girl when she spoke again, " just like an umpire at a cricket match." Then very quickly she added : " Do you really mind my being here, Mr. Keston ? "

Before he had time to answer her she said :

" The fact is, I wanted some relief. I have had Aunt Edith on my shoulders since breakfast-time. Connie is with Uncle Edmund, and Beth has one of her bad headaches, poor dear ! So I have been trying to do some of her work—not very successfully, I am afraid. It is so natural for Beth to be sweet and amiable with people even if she doesn't like them, but I find it an awful effort. This doesn't explain, however, does it, why I came here ? " Drusilla ended, with a laugh.

She got up from the chair, and sat down on the edge of the table.

" I want you to coach me, Mr. Keston, to give me a few names that I could introduce into my conversation," she laughed. " You see, Aunt Edith doesn't *quite* approve of this library, and she has made up her mind that Beth has paid a fancy price for it. It isn't any business of hers, of course, but that doesn't make any difference to Aunt

Edith. Now, I want to impress her, to let her understand that Beth has done a clever stroke of business. I know I can do it if you will only help me. What are the biggest things you've got here? Isn't there something which no other library has got? If there isn't, please invent that something. I'll be ever so grateful to you, Mr. Keston, if you'll only give me a real, good chance of crushing Aunt Edith. She is so nasty to me!"

"I'm afraid names alone won't carry much weight to an expert," said Keston, still a little stiffly.

"It isn't names exactly that I want," said Drusilla; "it is what these biggest things really signify in monetary value. Aunt Edith is always impressed by pounds, shillings and pence. Have you a pencil and some paper?"

He gave her his note-book, and, drawing the chair up to the table, she sat down with the pencil in her mouth, and looked at him. He was conscious then of the illuminating power of her beauty.

It was a cold, grey day, but Drusilla seemed to bring warmth and light into the big, as yet empty-looking, room. Then, too, she was so young. There was the eagerness, the spontaneity of a child in her expression and manner.

"Suppose you tell your aunt that there are no less than nine perfect Caxtons in the library, worth anything from twenty to thirty thousand pounds," Brian Keston said as a beginning.

"I say," said Drusilla impulsively, "what a lot of money! Caxton? How do you spell it? and who was Caxton when he was at home? But that isn't fair," she added, with her enchanting laugh. "I asked you to coach me, not to educate me. Yes; nine Caxtons. Oh, please go on, Mr. Keston! This is a splendid beginning!"

He felt his stiffness thawing; and as he began to enu-

merate a few of the really priceless books which had passed into Bertha Heronworth's possession he warmed to the task.

"Here," he said, touching one of the huge cases, "is a rare collection of things relating to the Reformation of the Church of England, and here an almost unique collection of the earliest books on gardening. Miss Heronworth also possesses a copy of the first book printed in England with woodcuts, which is in splendid preservation. I should imagine there is not another to equal it, although it is known that there are one or two other copies in existence."

He enumerated many others, spelling the different names for Drusilla to write down.

"I shall have to learn this by heart—that is the difficulty. I am so horribly stupid at learning anything," the girl said dubiously after a while. "Look here. I'll tell you what you might do: just pencil beside all these roughly what you think the value of each book is."

She gave him the note-book and the pencil.

"Isn't it queer," she said, after a pause, "how much some people seem to think about money? Aunt Edith has been rich all her life, yet nothing impresses her so much as a large banking account. When she sees a wonderful cathedral she never realizes it is beautiful—she only wonders how much it cost to build; and Uncle Edmund is so different! I do hope you'll like him, Mr. Keston; he is an enthusiast about books."

"I hope he is better," said Keston, reverting a little to his awkward manner.

"I am afraid he isn't. I went to his room this morning, but my cousin said he wasn't well enough to see me. I call Connie my cousin, but there isn't really any relationship, and Uncle Edmund is only our uncle by marriage.

He is, anyhow, much, much nearer to us, and so is Connie, than Aunt Edith ever could be."

Brian Keston stood making calculations and marking figures in the note-book, and Drusilla, looking at him, recalled her aunt's chatter about him.

"Of course, I knew he was a gentleman," she mused to herself, "but I didn't think there was anything romantic about him. That only shows how little we know other people. I wonder what *I* should do if I lost all I had? I am sure I should make a helpless muddle of things! No wonder he looks hard. It must make him bitter to feel that his father died because he trusted all he had to a friend. I *was* going to call him a prig, but now I shan't!"

As she sat waiting for Mr. Keston to give her back the notebook, there came a knock at the door, and Durning, the butler, appeared.

"Lord Carlingford—he is waiting in the hall, Miss Drusilla."

Drusilla uttered an impatient exclamation, and pushed back her chair so sharply that it scratched on the floor.

"He has come to see Miss Heronworth, not me," she said.

The butler answered:

"I told him as Miss Heronworth was in her room ill, and he asked for you, miss."

"How tiresome!"

She sat frowning and tapping her foot for a little while, then she glanced at Keston, and a mischievous glint came into her eyes.

"Bring Lord Carlingford here," she said, and she sat humming to herself till the door was opened again, then she got up languidly.

"How do you do, Lord Carlingford?" she said. "Isn't

it cold ? . . . Beth is in bed . . . sensible Beth ! . . . I think you know Mr. Keston."

Carlingford looked extremely cross.

"Your sister asked me to come this morning !" he said, as shortly as courtesy would permit.

"Did she ? I am so sorry you should have had such a very cold drive all for nothing. But really she has an awful head—she isn't shamming. Beth couldn't sham if she tried ever so . . . not like me ! Now, Lord Carlingford, you have to be immensely impressed, if you please. Here you find yourself in the presence of the great Caroby library, which my sister has just bought. You really ought to make a bow all round."

Carlingford stood stiffly by the fire and looked at her, not at the huge packing-cases or the empty shelves waiting to be filled. He had seen as he had entered that Drusilla was not alone ; and though he had vouchsafed the scantiest of greetings to Keston he was acutely conscious that the other man was not one to be ignored.

"Can I ask you to take a message to your sister ?" he queried after a little pause.

Drusilla shook her head.

"Oh, I never disturb Beth when she is not well. Do you want her to do something ? Won't I do ?"

The young man bit his lip, and then he took a bold step.

"You know perfectly well why I am here, Drusilla," he said.

The girl had sat down again, but now she got up precipitately.

"Suppose we go back to the hall. We are just an awful nuisance to Mr. Keston. I can see him scowling, though he pretends to be amiable." She paused, on her way to the door, close to Brian Keston. "It has been so awfully

good of you to help me. I can't begin to thank you properly, Mr. Keston," she said. "I am going to startle Aunt Edith. I shall work in all this knowledge in the most cunning way possible. Are you sure I may keep this note-book?"

Drusilla hummed under her breath as she left the way to the hall, but about Lord Carlingford there was an ominous silence.

"Now, won't you take off your coat and make yourself ever so comfortable? I won't promise to amuse you—I never am amusing when there is a fog—but we've got all the illustrated papers, and I give you permission to flirt with Aunt Edith. Perhaps if you wait a little while Beth will be well enough to come down and see you."

Carlingford stood half a moment irresolutely, then he gripped her by the wrist.

"Why did you shut yourself up with that man?" he asked. "Do you think that it is a right thing that you should be there alone for hours?"

Drusilla caught her breath just for an instant, as if she were a little afraid, and then she laughed.

"Oh, my dear, good, kind gentleman," she said, "don't exaggerate! When you know me a little better you will realize that I never stay hours in any one place, or with any one person. You don't know how bored I get with things and people."

There was a black look on the young man's face; but there was something more—a look of entreaty, almost a look of pain.

"Your sister promised to see me this morning," Carlingford said, "to receive from me what you have received already—a proposition that you should become my wife."

Drusilla had taken her hand away from his, and was rubbing the wrist softly.

"Well, it is a great pity Beth has such a bad headache," she said. Then her eyes gleamed. "I wonder—yes, I do wonder—if she hasn't, just for once, invented that she is ill! She is such a kind-hearted creature, and she does hate saying 'No' so badly."

She moved to the fireplace, picked up a log, and flung it on to the flames.

"And of course that is what she would have been obliged to say? She would have done it very prettily, but——"

"There isn't going to be any question of 'No,'" said Carlingford, in the quietest way possible; "and somehow I think your sister realizes that."

Drusilla caught her breath rather sharply.

"But truly and truly I don't want to marry you or anybody," she said. "O. B., I don't."

"I repeat, you are going to marry me," replied the man, "before Christmas."

Drusilla literally shivered.

"On the contrary, I mean to have a happy Christmas. I want to be ever so jolly, and how *can* one be jolly when one is married? It is my firm belief that you are in the habit of going round arranging to be married to someone each Christmas-time, Lord Carlingford. It isn't at all a bad idea! Makes a little excitement, doesn't it?"

Lord Carlingford had slipped out of his heavy coat, and was standing quite close to her in front of the fire.

"When I leave here to-morrow," he said, "I shall go to Yorkshire, just tell my people all about you, and then come back and take you there."

CHAPTER VI.

DRUSILLA laughed, half humorously and half angrily.

"You really are too absurd for words!" she declared. "It has taken me a whole morning to try and root out of Aunt Edith's mind certain objectionable ideas about you and about me. It wasn't nice of you, you know, to do what you did last night. You can't imagine how shocked Beth was, and it was such a blow, too, because I had been telling her what nice manners you had; how well you had been educated, and——"

The sentence finished abruptly, for suddenly Drusilla found herself in Lord Carlingford's arms. He held her as in a vice.

"You are going to be serious for once, sweetheart," he said. "You are going to hear me tell you that I love you; that I mean to marry you; and you—you are going to tell me the same thing."

Drusilla's lips quivered; she tried to refute this, but she could not utter a word.

It was an alarming and yet a delicious sensation, to be held in that firm embrace. He was her master in this moment, and she recognized vaguely there was an extraordinary amount of happiness attached to her submission. Still, in her mischievous way

(and yet not wholly in mischief) she played with the situation.

"You can't make me say things that are not true," she answered him, "although you can of course squash me up because you are so much stronger." Then, very hurriedly: "Oh, please do let me go! Somebody may come in! We—we—look so idiotic."

But he only tightened his hold.

"I don't care who comes," he said; "the more the better! I want everybody to know that we belong to one another, and that in as short a time as possible we shall be man and wife."

Then he stooped, and kissed her on her brow, on her eyes, and finally on her lips.

"Tell me once, only once, that you care for me," he entreated.

But Drusilla laughed—a broken, little laugh.

"How can I tell you I care for you, when I am getting an awful crick in my back, and you are choking all the breath out of me?"

Carlingford bent his head, not to kiss her this time, but to look into her eyes steadily, so steadily that Drusilla could not return his gaze. Then he smiled and loosened his arm.

"You can go," he said. "After all, I am satisfied."

The girl laughed nervously.

"Are you? Really you are a lucky person."

She rubbed her hand up and down the back of her neck.

"It is so stiff," she said, "I shall be obliged to sit with my back to somebody for the rest of the day. I can't turn my head." Then suddenly she threw herself into an armchair. "Now I am going to probe this matter," she declared. "As you are so certain you are going to marry

me, there are some things I want to know. Prepare yourself. I am going to ask you some perfectly odious questions ! ”

Carlingford was smiling now.

“ Fire away,” he said.

“ Well, to start with,” said Drusilla, “ do you think I am nice really, or only because I happen to have a certain amount of money ? Don’t shoot me,” she finished, with a laugh.

He did not answer at once ; a wave of hot colour had swept over his face ; then he said with dignity :

“ Money in connection with you has had no existence in my thoughts, and never could have any connection.”

Drusilla felt she ought to have made an apology, but she did not.

“ Very well, then : we will pass on. Question number two : Are you making love to me (I believe that is the right phrase, isn’t it ?) because you’ve been jilted, and you want to vex some other woman ? ”

He laughed so heartily at this that Drusilla made haste to get to her third question.

“ This you are not bound to answer,” she said, “ but I feel it is my duty to myself to ask it.” She paused irresolutely, and then said : “ Am I the only woman you have ever loved ? ”

And, laughing still, he said, in the promptest way possible :

“ Oh, dear no ! I have been in love scores of times. I can’t begin to count how many ! ”

To this Miss Drusilla Heronworth said “ Oh ! ” in a rather peculiar tone, and Carlingford, putting on rather a grave expression, asked her :

“ Shall I tell you about just a few ? ”

She said "No!" a second time, and rather sharply added: "I am not a bit interested."

"That is the right view," said Carlingford.

He dropped into a chair close to hers, and took one of her small hands in both of his.

"Nothing of what has gone matters in the least. I am thirty-three years old, Drusilla, and I have had a fairly busy time, but I give you my word of honour I never knew what it was to love in the real sense of the word until I met you. Yesterday you called me cruel, and I do believe I have been cruel. What is more, I know I could be cruel to anything or anyone who tried to divide us, but I'm something better than that, and so you will find out if you only treat me well. You are going to treat me well, aren't you, Drusilla?"

"I won't make any rash promises," the girl said. Nevertheless, she let him hold her hand, and they sat in silence for the length of one moment, and then Drusilla said, with a touch of gravity in her voice: "You know, I don't really want to be rude or anything like that, but I do feel that you are making a mistake."

"In what way, dearest?" Carlingford asked.

Drusilla did not answer him in direct fashion.

"You don't know me, I don't know you. You say time doesn't count, but I am very much afraid it does. Wouldn't it be awful if—say, in six months—you realized that I was the one person on earth you hated most?"

He laughed at this, but she still looked serious.

"But that is the sort of thing that does happen over and over again; everybody will tell you so. The proper sort of marriage is one," said Drusilla wisely, "when two people have known each other for ages and ages, and have got so tired of each other's faults that they really haven't got the spirit to quarrel with one another."

"The proper sort of marriage," said Carlingford, "is that in which two people love each other and grow together in sympathy closer and closer, as they grow older."

"Well," said Drusilla, "if I have to marry you I want a five years' engagement."

"Five weeks', you mean," he answered.

He was kissing her hand, and he now held it a little way off, and looked at it admiringly.

"How pretty it is!" he said. "And yet it is a very capable hand. It looks as if you could be quite resolute."

"That is what I have been trying to impress on you these two last days," said Drusilla; then she took her hand away from him abruptly, and changed her tone. "Here comes Aunt Edith," she said.

"In time to give us her blessing," Carlingford added, as he rose to his feet.

But Mrs. Lingfield did not encourage any confidences, neither had she a benedictory expression.

She came, it appeared, to look for a certain newspaper, accepting Lord Carlingford's futile exertions to find this paper with a smile on her lips which made Drusilla want to shake her.

As she went away, Mrs. Lingfield said: "I am going to see how poor Beth is. I thought her looking so terribly ill last night."

Drusilla sighed sharply.

"That is a slap at me," she said. "I am supposed to be neglecting Beth. Though she hasn't said it openly, I know Aunt Edith was furious because I went away this summer, and specially furious because I stayed at Braske. She always wants to go there herself; and Kitty Deravan won't ask her."

Before her lover could say anything, the girl had gone on rather hotly:

"It is not true! Beth is not ill. Headaches are not serious. Oh!"—she caught in her breath sharply—"oh, I couldn't bear to be happy if Beth were ill!"

Carlingford possessed himself of her hands once again.

"Then you are a little bit happy?"

"Just a little bit," said Drusilla. And she blushed as she made the confession. Then she said: "You'll lunch here, of course? I must go up and look after Beth. Aunt Edith isn't quite the sort of person one wants to have about one when one has a bad headache. Sit here, and I'll send Connie to keep you company; but you won't flirt with her, will you?"

She laughed as she drifted out of his touch, and ran lightly up the oaken staircase. At the bend she stood and waved her hand to him, and at the top she ran into Miss Lingfield, who was dressed for walking.

"Oh, Connie," said Drusilla, sitting down on the top stair and pulling the other girl down beside her, "I've been and gone and done it! I'm engaged! Do I look different? I suppose I ought to feel very big and important. On the contrary, I seem to have grown smaller and smaller."

Connie Lingfield kissed her.

"I'm awfully glad, Drusilla. I like him ever so much."

"I don't mean to tell Aunt Edith anything about it until she goes away. I mean that things are definitely settled. I want to scandalize her," said Drusilla, with a laugh. "I feel somehow that she would be obliged to say that she disapproved of him, and that would vex me horribly."

"Oh, I don't think you need be afraid of that," said Miss Lingfield, as she got up. "Mother has a few weaknesses, you know, and it isn't only Americans who love a lord."

"That is very true," said Drusilla, getting up too.

Then she said : " Connie, the queer thing is that I never stopped to realize what a big, important person Jim is ! You have just opened my eyes. I believe I shall go down and tell him I shan't have him."

" I would if I were you," said Miss Lingfield ; " it will make such a lot of impression on him."

" I don't want to be a big, important person," said Drusilla. " One never seems to live for oneself ; everybody has the right to look in on the domestic career of important people."

" Well, that will make you careful," laughed the other girl. Then she put her arms round Drusilla and kissed her a second time most tenderly. " Leave all those things to him, leave everything to him. I've always felt that you wanted some one just like Lord Carlingford to take care of you, Drusilla ; and now you've got him, and I congratulate you with all my heart."

" Connie is a duck !" said Drusilla to herself, as she went along the passage to her sister's room. She knocked first, and then turned the handle.

Miss Heronworth was not visible, but her maid was in the room, and told Miss Drusilla that her mistress had gone to sit with Mr. Lingfield half an hour ago.

" All right, then. I'll wait for her," said Drusilla.

She sat down in the armchair by the fire. She had a great affection for her sister's bedroom, it was such a contrast to her own.

Bertha had lavished every sort of pretty ornament on Drusilla ; her own apartment was rather old-fashioned, and almost austere.

The furniture was that which had been in the room for certainly two generations, and there was a large, old writing-bureau, on which papers were stacked with methodical neatness, and a basket containing the morning's

delivery placed where it would receive immediate attention.

"I hope," Drusilla said, suddenly addressing the maid, "that Miss Heronworth has not been writing this morning?"

"Indeed, and she has, miss! There was such a lot of things come for her that she said she must answer. The usual begging-letters, miss—most of them. Some pretty bad cases, too, if what was written was true."

"Poor souls!" said Drusilla involuntarily.

She sat on after the maid had gone away, and looked at the old writing-table. She had seen it almost every day, ever since she could remember anything very clearly, but somehow the significance of its mission had never touched her till now.

The fact was that Drusilla had never been taught to think very seriously about those matters which constitute the real meaning of life to the majority of human beings. Like most people who are surrounded from childhood with everything that money can buy, her comprehension of the power of this money was stunted. Vaguely she knew, of course, that whilst she lived like a young princess there were thousands and thousands who toiled to earn a living, but she had never troubled herself about those other people; never entered, or even tried to share, her sister's busy life, with its unceasing flow of charity. And now, by a strange conglomeration of little circumstances, Drusilla felt that she was awakening, as it were, from a long sleep.

When she had sat talking with her aunt, listening to the story of that commercial disaster which had ended so tragically for Brian Keston's father, and again when she had sat fencing, as it were, with her aunt on the subject of her own probable marriage, there had come to Drusilla

that sense of smallness of which she had spoken to Connie Lingfield. It lingered now. She felt suddenly nervous, and for some unaccountable reason a little afraid ; and into this troubled sensation there came a great yearning for her sister.

"I do wish Beth would come !" she said, to herself. "If she doesn't come in five minutes I will go to Uncle Edmund's room. I haven't seen him yet." But as she moved restlessly in the chair the door opened, and Bertha Heronworth came in.

CHAPTER VII.

MISS HERONWORTH certainly looked as if she had a very bad headache.

"Here you are, darling!" cried Drusilla. "I hoped you were resting. And Catherine tells me you have been doing your usual morning's work. Why don't you rest a little while?"

The younger girl took her sister into her arms, and held her caressingly.

"You never came to say 'Good night,' " she said. "I waited ever so long, and at last I had to go to sleep."

"I am so sorry," said Bertha Heronworth.

As she took herself away from her sister's embrace she looked at Drusilla. There was an expression in her eyes which both puzzled and hurt Drusilla.

"Jim—I mean Lord Carlingford—is here, and I've asked him to stay to lunch; but you needn't bother to come down. Aunt Edith can chaperone us. By the way, Beth," Drusilla added, "she was coming to you: that's why I hurried up to protect you."

"I haven't seen her this morning," said Miss Heronworth. "Catherine kept my door locked; my headache was very bad, but it is almost gone now, and I shall certainly come down to lunch. I want to see Lord Carlingford."

"And he wants to see you," said Drusilla.

The sisters stood an instant looking at one another, then Bertha drew Drusilla to her, and kissed her almost passionately :

"And you are going to be happy—you are going to be very, very happy?"

"I am not going to be," said Drusilla with a little laugh—"I *am* very happy! Of course, I am not quite used to the idea of belonging to somebody else, but I shall get accustomed to it; and he is rather a dear, isn't he, Beth?"

"Uncle Edmund has been telling me a little about him. You know, he is an old friend of Lord Southborne, and he has known Carlingford since he was a lad."

"And so Uncle Edmund approves, and the lease can be signed?"

"Uncle Edmund wants you to be happy. He is very fond of you, Drusilla. I never realized how much he cared about you till this morning."

"It seems to me," said Drusilla, "I've got just a little bit too much. To make matters just, I ought to share things with some other girl, oughtn't I?"

"If you feel that you have so much, darling," said Bertha, in a low voice, "you can always share with others, and find a joy in doing it."

She did not speak very evenly, and tears seemed perilously near her eyes.

It was a new thing for Drusilla to see her sister in this nervous, agitated condition. Miss Heronworth was generally so calm, there was about her a seriousness which gave her, as Lord Carlingford had at once remarked, a maturity far beyond her years. To-day she seemed to have passed through a nerve-storm, to be even at this moment bracing herself up as though to face some ordeal. Though Drusilla did not grasp this fully, she still was

sensible that there was about her sister an element which was new to her and disturbing, and, as certain ideas flashed suddenly through her mind, she turned to Bertha.

"It is true I am happy," Drusilla said; "but you have always come first with me, Beth, and I want you to know that nothing will change my love for you."

"Do you think I doubt that?" asked Bertha.

She rallied herself very quickly.

"You mustn't put wrong ideas into your mind," she said. "I feel a little bit upset because Uncle Edmund looks so terribly ill. It seems that he has these heart attacks so frequently now, he really ought not to have undertaken this journey yesterday; but, as I told you last night, he seems to have had a great longing to see us both, and that is why he came."

"Well, I am glad he did come," said Drusilla, "because we can nurse him, and take ever so much care of him, dear old thing!"

"Now, darling, don't let me keep you," said Bertha. "Please tell Lord Carlingford that he will see me at luncheon."

"I think I will put on my things," said Drusilla. "We shall just have time to walk to the village and meet Connie. Don't let Aunt Edith come in here to worry you, Beth."

"Oh, I can take care of myself!" Bertha said, with a little laugh.

She watched Drusilla pass out of the door, and as she was alone she put one hand to her brow, and the other to her heart.

"It is done now," she said, "and we can't undo it. God forgive me if I am doing wrong in keeping the truth from Drusilla!"

CHAPTER VIII.

As Drusilla left her sister's room and went in the direction of her own she passed the apartment occupied by Mr. Lingfield. Just for an instant she hesitated, then she passed on.

"No ; I won't go now. I'll get Connie to take me to see Uncle Edmund this afternoon."

The door of the room adjoining that of Mr. Lingfield's was opened just as Drusilla was moving past it. The girl, however, did not notice that her aunt, catching sight of her, had withdrawn quickly and closed the door cautiously.

There was a flushed look on Mrs. Lingfield's comely face, and in her eyes a curious expression, a nervous, strained look, and yet a look of excitement, as she went back to the chair on which she had been sitting.

On leaving Drusilla and Lord Carlingford, Mrs. Lingfield had carried out her stated intention, and had gone to pay a visit to her niece. Miss Heronworth's maid informed her that her mistress was sitting with Mr. Lingfield. The information annoyed Mrs. Lingfield. She was one of those persons who, though so richly endowed both physically and materially, was constitutionally suspicious and jealous at every turn. Just as she had always resented

Bertha's inheritance of her father's enormous wealth, so she had been jealous of the deep bond of affection which had existed from the very first between Edmund Lingfield and Bertha; and for some reason, which she would have found very hard to explain, she now flamed into anger at the idea that there might be some matter to be discussed between her husband and her niece about which she knew nothing.

To a mind set in this fashion it was very easy to jump to conclusions; and as she left Bertha Heronworth's room and walked slowly towards her husband's, there flashed back to Mrs. Lingfield's thoughts the remembrance that when she had gone in early that morning to inquire how her husband was, and what sort of night he had passed, she had seen him take up a note which had been lying on a table near, and push it under the pillow. As the morning's post had brought nothing either for Mr. Lingfield or herself, it was very evident that this note must have been written by some one in the house. Of course, Mrs. Lingfield did not for one single instant imagine that there could be anything of a mysterious nature which Bertha would have to discuss with Mr. Lingfield. At the same time, recalling the nervous irritation with which Bertha had listened to her remarks about Lord Carlingford the night before, Mrs. Lingfield shrewdly guessed that, if any counsel were to be asked, Bertha would not turn to her.

As she reached her husband's door his valet emerged from the dressing-room.

"Where are you going?" asked Mrs. Lingfield, in her sharp way.

The servant explained that his master had desired him to go below, as he wished to be left alone with Miss Heronworth.

This was naturally quite enough for Mrs. Lingfield. She waited until the man was out of sight, and then she crept very quietly into the dressing-room and closed the door. Her heart was beating very quickly. Like most people who do mean actions, she had no desire to be discovered in the act of doing them.

At the same time she was fully resolved now on hearing what Bertha had to say to her husband. At first she had imagined that the door leading into the bedroom was closed, but as she sat down and held her breath she noticed that it was only shut to, and that the voices from within could be heard quite distinctly. Mrs. Lingfield sat motionless for quite twenty minutes. The words she overheard were so unexpected, the subject so little dreamed of, that at first she felt almost stunned; then little by little her faculties emerged from that trance-like sensation; thought became active, excitement ran like fever in her veins, and amazement, condemnation, and a curious kind of triumph fought for mastery. For once in her life her suspicion, which as a rule was so groundless, so contemptible, had been surprisingly justified. But in the place of jealousy there arose an overwhelming flood of righteous indignation.

Mrs. Lingfield prided herself upon being a woman with plenty of common sense, and certainly she was by no means a fool, but it seemed to her now, as she sat listening breathlessly and eagerly, that an unpardonable affront had been offered to her shrewd mind; that the secret which Bertha and Edmund Lingfield had guarded so carefully, and now were discussing so tenderly, was a wrong done, to herself first of all, and then to the world in general. She held herself very still as she heard Bertha take a temporary farewell of her uncle, and then go away.

Mrs. Lingfield was not prepared to confront her husband immediately. As a matter of fact, she hardly knew

what attitude she intended to take. The discovery she had made, though it did not really touch her own interests intimately, was yet of so important a nature that she could hardly fail to regard it as a personal matter ; and then, associated with it were so many, many emotions, so much that would require meditation. She hardly knew how long she sat after Bertha's departure, but when she rose at last, and moved cautiously to the door leading to the passage, the last person she desired to meet was Drusilla ; and, as she drew back quickly to avoid being seen by the girl, the wave of resentful bitterness which swept over her made her tremble from head to foot.

Happily, Drusilla went her way, ignorant of the malevolent forces already at work to undermine that happiness which was so sweet, so new, so bewildering.

As she joined Carlingford in the hall, and they went out into the bleak, cold morning together, Drusilla felt that sense of confidence, with which the man had inspired her from the first, strengthen and deepen.

" I didn't want you, and I never, never thought for an instant that you wanted me ; but now that you have made me see things with your eyes, I really think I like you very much," she remarked, after a while.

" You haven't any more questions to ask me, I suppose ? " demanded Carlingford.

" Oh, heaps," said Drusilla ; " tiresome questions too, all on the same theme—you, me, and the future."

" Are you so afraid of the future, then ? "

" Just a little bit, because, you see, I have never thought about it one way or another till now. I have had my eyes shut to all that is real. Beth has kept me a baby. It is my private opinion that she would have liked to have kept me a baby always. I'll tell you one view of the future that I *should* like to think was possible.

Couldn't we work, couldn't we do something together? Beth does such an awful lot of good—I should like to do good, too."

"Well, you will have three people to help, you—your sister, my mother, and myself. I got tired of doing nothing in a picturesque way a long time ago. We'll plan out all sorts of things."

And so they talked, mingling tenderness and nonsense and seriousness, as they wended their way through the country roads.

They quite forgot to look for Miss Lingfield, a fact which was brought home to them when they all assembled a little later at luncheon.

"You know, of course, we have been to the village to meet you," said Drusilla; "and we thought the earth must have opened and swallowed you up, for we couldn't see a sign of you."

Connie Lingfield laughed at this.

"I don't believe you went to the village at all," she said, "and I am quite, quite sure you never thought about me."

At which Drusilla laughed too, and blushed.

"Connie dear, that is rude," she said, and in the same breath she added: "but it is quite true. I really did forget all about you."

She sat near her sister, and every now and then cuddled her hands in Bertha's.

Mrs. Lingfield and Lord Carlingford carried on a conversation which dealt chiefly with well-known people. She was gracious enough to the young man, but she managed, in the cleverest way possible, to make Drusilla a little uncomfortable.

"It is awfully silly of me," said the girl to herself. "I ought to be well used to Aunt Edith and her ways by this time, but I do wish she wouldn't be so catty to-

day ! If people only knew how easy it was to be nice, I don't think they'd ever be nasty."

After luncheon the elder Miss Heronworth and Lord Carlingford sat and talked together in the drawing-room, and Drusilla hoped for half an hour's pleasant chat with Connie ; but Mrs. Lingfield had other views for her step-daughter.

" Please come upstairs with me, Connie. I want you to write some letters," she said, " and then you ought to read to your father."

" Oh, do let me do that ! " interposed Drusilla eagerly. " I adore reading aloud, and Uncle Edmund always says he likes to listen to me."

" My dear Drusilla," said Mrs. Lingfield, " you mustn't usurp everything. I am sure if Edmund wants you he will ask for you."

" Now, there," said Drusilla to herself as she was left alone in the hall, standing in front of the log fire—" there is another nasty slap ! What *have* I done to make Aunt Edith so disagreeable ? Well, never mind ; she doesn't count for very much ! "

She laughed as she wheeled round and picked up her sables, then she caught sight of Mr. Keston's note-book lying on the broad mantelshelf. " I must give this back to him," she said.

She took it up and opened it almost without thinking.

" How methodical he is ! " she said to herself, " and he was very kind. I think he is only shy, and I don't suppose he quite understands my peculiar little ways."

As she was closing the note-book it slipped from her hand ; and when she stooped to pick it up she saw that a thin card had fallen from it. This card was worn and faded and the heading caught Drusilla's eyes :

"Of your charity, pray for the soul of Richard Marchmont Keston."

Colouring hotly as though she had looked on some sacred secret, Drusilla slipped the card once again into the shabby note-book. The fact that Brian Keston carried about with him always this little reminder of his father impressed her sharply and pathetically.

"At least *he* does not forget easily," she said to herself.

CHAPTER IX.

LORD CARLINGFORD left for Yorkshire that same afternoon. Drusilla parted with him reluctantly.

"I feel," she said, "as if you were going on an expedition to the North Pole; and, really, this home journey of yours is a bit of an adventure, isn't it? Suppose you find yourself icebound in your family's disapproval? They may not want to have anything to say to me, you know."

But Lord Carlingford went away in the highest spirits. It would make absolutely no difference to him if his parents were to object to his choice of a wife; but, as a matter of fact, untitled though they were, the Heronworths, apart from their wealth, were the equal of any man.

"I shall be back the day after to-morrow," he said. "Have all your boxes packed. I would take you with me now, only I don't think it is fair to your sister. You see, we have churned her up a little bit. She told me just now she had not even begun to think of your marriage."

"No; I know she hasn't," Drusilla answered. "All this is a great surprise to her, and to me too. Perhaps when you are in Yorkshire I shall change my mind."

But her heart went with him. Indeed, she felt terribly lonely when he had gone, and sought consolation from Connie Lingfield.

As they sat in front of the fire on the hearthrug, Drusilla sighed several times.

"Connie," she said, "love is a very beautiful thing, but it is also rather terrible. I feel frightened."

The other girl laughed.

"Frightened, dearest ! Why, what have you to be afraid of ? "

"Nothing, and yet everything," answered Drusilla. "Now I begin to understand what Kitty Deravan meant when she was talking to me the other day about her children. She said : ' I love them so much there are times when I wish they had never come to me.' That is how I feel to-night."

"Cheer up," said Miss Lingfield brightly. "You are going to have the loveliest of lives, with nothing morbid or disappointing in it. You know what the song says : ' Love is meant to make us glad.' "

Drusilla sat and stared into the fire for two whole moments, and then she sprang to her feet.

"I believe you are right, Connie, and I am glad to be ever so glad ; that is," she added, "if Aunt Edith will let me."

Though Miss Lingfield laughingly disposed of any really inimical feeling on her stepmother's part, she had been struck that evening by the marked manner in which Mrs. Lingfield avoided conversation with Drusilla, and refrained from discussing the event of the moment.

Connie was secretly delighted that Drusilla had shown outwardly no sign of irritation or annoyance, but she was quick to notice that her stepmother's manner had very evidently disturbed Bertha Heronworth ; and, as a matter of fact, Connie herself had never known her father's wife in such a mood as that which had prevailed with her on this evening. The girl could only conjecture that, ridiculous

as it might seem, the older woman was really jealous of Drusilla's brilliant prospects.

All through the next day, however, this same strained, semi-hostile note characterized Mrs. Lingfield's attitude towards her younger niece. When telegrams came from Yorkshire, followed by jewels sent from London, Mrs. Lingfield expressed neither interest, pleasure, nor curiosity; and if it had not been for the presence of her father at dinner that night, Connie Lingfield would have found it very hard to have kept the ball of conversation rolling. It was Drusilla who really begged the girl to come to her rescue. She sought Connie in her bedroom, in the early morning of the day on which Carlingford was to come back to her, and she carried with her a letter from his mother (sweet and tender, and even loving), and a very pleasantly worded one from his father.

Nothing prettier than Drusilla in her rose-coloured silk dressing-gown, and her beautiful hair, pinned in picturesque disorder about her head, could be well imagined; but Connie was quick to see that there were tear-stains about her eyes, and Drusilla confessed frankly that she had been crying.

"And it is all on account of Aunt Edith," she said. "I don't mind her being horrid to me, because you know, Connie darling, she never really has cared about me—goodness knows why! But she is making Beth perfectly wretched. It sounds so beastly, but you will understand me, won't you, darling? when I say I wish you would take her away! If you could only take her away, and leave Uncle Edmund, and come back yourself, that would be heavenly!"

"I quite understand how you feel," said Connie Lingfield. "And, honestly, Drusilla, I think you have every right to be vexed with mother: she is too silly. But any-

how, darling, we settled last night we should leave early this morning. Father is well enough to travel."

"I have such a strange feeling about Aunt Edith," said Drusilla when they had talked a little more. "I don't want her to meet Jim when he comes here to-day. Of course, there isn't anything she could say or do to make mischief between us, I know, but still, her manner is so curious that somehow I feel uneasy. And oh, Connie, now that I know I love him, now that his mother and everybody else want us to be happy, I do so dread anything coming to spoil this happiness!"

"Silly child!" said Connie Lingfield. And she said so many cheering and delightful things that Drusilla's smiles and radiant look came back again.

She wrapped herself tightly in her silken gown and danced back to her own room, but Connie Lingfield sat and mused a while.

She had thought it altogether wiser not to speak to her stepmother about her very evident disapproval of Drusilla's engagement; but despite the fact that the matter had been practically tabooed between them, Miss Lingfield had been almost painfully impressed by the conviction that her stepmother was harbouring some curious grudge against Drusilla. "And yet," Connie said to herself, "as Drusilla has just said, there isn't anything really she could do or say. Still, I am glad we are going away. I expect in a day or two mother will recover from this odd fit of hers. Anyhow, she won't be able to annoy Drusilla. In this instance it will be a case of out of sight agreeably out of mind!"

CHAPTER X.

LORD CARLINGFORD had been quite in earnest when he had urged that his marriage should take place as soon as possible, but he found himself compelled to give way to Bertha Heronworth's plea for less haste.

"You see," she said to him when the matter was discussed, "I have to get used to the idea that I must make the rest of my life as best I can without Drusilla." And then with a little laugh she had added quickly: "Oh, no! I know what you are going to say, but believe me, Jim, it won't be the same thing; it never is the same thing! Your marriage will take from me my dearest, my most precious possession." Then, before he could say anything, Miss Heronworth had put out her hand. "Please do forgive me," she said. "I am afraid that sounds horribly selfish." And Carlingford just clasped her hand in both his and said nothing.

He had, indeed, the purest feeling of sympathy for Drusilla's sister, and with the most delicate tact he forbore to claim too much of his betrothed in these days, which were in truth to Bertha Heronworth wintry and dark days.

Drusilla paid her duty-visit to Yorkshire, and, as was so natural with her, won the hearts of her future husband's people just simply by the sheer significance of her gracious and fascinating personality.

She wrote to Beth when she was staying away, and gave a full account of all her prospective new relations,

"If there could be another person in the world, the least bit like you," she wrote, "I think Jim's mother is that person. I have just missed meeting Flora, the second girl, who married Lord Torchester, you know, but Daisy, who is the eldest of the family, is a dear, though she is really quite plain, not a bit like Jim! I adore the two younger girls, who are just like young colts, and are not out of the school-room yet. At first I was inclined to be afraid of Lord Southborne, but there is a twinkle in his eye every now and then which is most disarming, and he wears his hat rakishly on one side. It is all very grand, Beth! I can't begin to count the servants. Every now and then I have a little sinking at my heart when I realize all the responsibilities that lie in front of me; and in these moments I have a craving for my dear old home and for you! I hope you are taking care of yourself and not shutting yourself up too much in the library? By the way, do you know I hear that Mr. Keston's mother is married to a Sir William Draycott? Daisy has a picture of her. She looks about seventeen, and I am told that she is one of the smartest women imaginable. I simply can't picture Mr. Keston with a mother like this! How is he getting on? Does he ever talk? Give him my love! No! I suppose I mustn't say that, but, instead, my dearest dear, take an ocean of love for your sweetheart self from your devoted Drusilla."

Bertha Heronworth had been quite prepared to let her sister go back to Yorkshire to spend Christmas, but Drusilla herself would have none of this arrangement.

"I am going to spend Christmas here with you, and I am going to hang up my stocking as usual, and Jim shall

come and help decorate the house. He can borrow that fascinating white coat which Mr. Keston wears. Beth," said Drusilla suddenly, "a wonderful thing happened yesterday. Mr. Keston actually laughed. I have been doing my best to provoke him to mirth all this long time, but without success. It was reserved for Bob to triumph where I failed. I suppose, by the way, he will be going to spend Christmas with his mother?"

"No," said Miss Heronworth; "in fact, I gather that he sees very little of his mother. You know, she came down here when you were away."

"No; did she?" said Drusilla, with animation. "And is she really as beautiful as her picture?"

"I am afraid I didn't think her at all beautiful," said Bertha Heronworth. "She was exquisitely dressed, and at a little distance she looked very young, but she is not the type of woman I care about." After a little pause she said: "Mr. Keston was so vexed with her for coming."

"I fancy he has a beastly temper," said Drusilla.

She was kneeling on the hearth, poking the fire with the end of her riding-crop. In her habit she looked very slim, very young, and almost boyish.

A wave of colour rushed over Bertha Heronworth's face. Her lips moved as though she would have spoken, but she said nothing, and at that moment Drusilla got up, banging imaginary dust from her habit-skirt with the crop she held.

"Have you heard from Aunt Edith lately?" she asked. "Connie wrote to me about a week ago. She said then that they were making plans to go abroad."

"I have not heard from Aunt Edith since she was here," Bertha Heronworth answered; and Drusilla laughed.

" Well, perhaps that is a mercy, for I am sure if she had written she would have only said nasty things about Jim and me. Beth, why *do* you suppose she has been so nasty about my engagement ? "

Bertha Heronworth did not answer immediately, and then she said : " Perhaps she is vexed because you did not tell her what was going on. She really can't find fault with Jim ; and it may be—" Bertha Heronworth added a little thoughtfully—" that this is at the bottom of the mischief, and what really annoys her, is that you will be so much greater socially than she is." "

" That is what Connie said," Drusilla answered, " but it seems so ridiculous ! Bertha, I *should* like to see Uncle Edmund before he goes abroad. I want to thank him for the sweet letter he wrote me. Lord Southborné was talking about him ; he thinks an awful lot of Uncle Edmund "

" He is a good man," said Bertha Heronworth in a low voice. " I think the best man I have ever known."

She stood looking into the fire, and Drusilla stood and looked at her with a pang. The younger girl suddenly realized that there was a change in her sister. Surely, Beth's face, always delicate and small, had grown even smaller ? When she was not speaking her expression was strangely sad. She looked pathetic, even a little desolate, and Drusilla's heart contracted sharply. She put down her hat and riding-crop, and she threw her arms round her sister.

" Oh, Beth darling ! " she said, " I don't want you to be unhappy. Why did Jim come ? I would have gone on living here for ages and ages and ages if he hadn't come, and then we should have been together and you would have been jolly ; and now," she pressed her lips to Bertha's cheek, " you look wretched."

Miss Heronworth turned, and there was reproach and contrition in her expression.

"Now, Drusilla," she said, "please don't imagine things. I am not going to pretend that I shall not miss you, and that life will be the same when you are gone; but oh! if you could only know how thankful I am that you are happy! And if you will only give me a little time I promise you I will be jolly."

Drusilla crushed her a little closer in her strong arms, and then she stood and chatted away in her merriest fashion for a few minutes longer. Then she said:

"Well, now, I must go and get out of these things."

But instead of going straight up to her room she made her way to the library.

By this time Brian Keston had grown accustomed to her unexpected appearances; in fact, he knew quite well the sound of her footsteps on the stone passage outside—she had a way of opening the door with a little jerk which always gave him a kind of thrill.

The arranging of the books was practically finished by this time, but there remained the manuscripts, and the work of making a catalogue with all its annotations, which would take a far longer period.

Drusilla walked up to the fireplace, and put one of her slender feet, in its long, patent-leather boot, on the fender.

Mr. Keston was engaged in placing some of the more precious manuscripts in one of the glass-covered desks.

He paused, and looked at Drusilla when she first came in, but when he found she had nothing apparently to say to him he went on with his work. Suddenly she spoke.

"Mr. Keston," she said, "I am bothered awfully about

Beth! I know I am not worth it, but I can't shut my eyes to the fact that she is fretting her heart out about me. Now, isn't she?"

The young man just glanced at her, and then said nothing.

A few weeks back he would have read vanity of the most arrogant nature in these straightforward words, but he had grown to understand Drusilla much better. He had grown (how, surely he hardly knew himself) to see the treasures which lay just below the surface of her merry, laughing, everyday mood.

"The thing that bothers me," said Drusilla, "is what I can do? Can you suggest anything?"

"I don't think there is anything to do," said Brian Keston.

And Drusilla lost her temper, and flashed out at him.

"But I came to you on purpose to talk this over! Don't you see I don't want to be happy if Beth is going to be miserable? You're clever, you've got brains, you know everything about books: just tell me now what I can do to make my sister happy."

"First of all," said Mr. Keston bluntly, "I don't know that you are right in supposing that Miss Heronworth is unhappy. Of course, she will miss you, but, like everybody else, she will get used to the change in her life as time passes."

Drusilla laughed at him.

"That is the most dull, commonplace remark I have ever heard. I take back my first assertion. I don't believe you are clever, Mr. Keston."

He touched the faded vellum leaves with a hand that was not quite steady.

"I arrived at that conclusion a long time ago!"

Drusilla looked at him without realizing that he was there, without hearing distinctly what he said.

"I have a good mind to take her up to town," she said slowly; "Beth is in such a groove down here. Yes; that is a splendid idea! I'll rush her round, I won't give her time to sit down and think about anything. If it were not for the servants I would make her stay in town for Christmas."

"I do think," said Brian Keston, shutting down the lid of the desk carefully, "that Miss Heronworth would be all the better for a little change."

"Why didn't you say that before?" asked Drusilla crossly; but the next moment she was smiling. "Look here," she said, "you've got to help me. I shall bustle Beth away as fast as I can. You'll back me up, won't you?"

She left the fireplace and walked across to the desk where he was standing, and stood a moment looking down on the old manuscripts—letters, they were, for the most part—which he had been affixing to the cloth-covered slopes.

"To think," said Drusilla, "that those bits of writing meant living thoughts, and that hundreds of years ago people could care and feel just as we care and feel! Life is a queer thing. I am not sure that I like to look at these old, old papers. They make one think too much."

She walked to the window, glanced out, came back again, and then stood looking at Brian Keston rather intently.

The riding attire gave her the effect of greater height.

Keston by this time had grown into the trick of finding some fresh suggestion of charm and beauty in every new aspect of this girl. As he felt her eyes studying him he looked up, colouring hotly; and just a little nervously Drusilla gave him an explanation:

"I was trying to see if you were one little bit like your mother. I have not seen her herself, you know, but I saw her picture when I was staying with Jim's people. His sisters know her well. I don't see the faintest resemblance."

"There is no resemblance," said Keston coldly.

"Perhaps you are like what your father was," said Drusilla.

She saw him actually wince, as though the mere mention of his father's name hurt him.

"I wish I were," he answered, and then he turned away.

Drusilla felt her heart beat a little quickly. This devotion to his dead father moved her far more than she could appreciate at the moment.

"Do you mind speaking to me about your father?" she asked in a low voice, after a little pause.

He did not answer immediately; then he said:

"No."

He came back to the desk with a fresh batch of papers in his hand, and, opening a fresh section of the glass cover, began carefully to pin these papers, and to place a heading and a number over each.

If he had turned and looked at Drusilla in this moment he would have seen that tears had gathered in her eyes, but he was not looking at her, and she saw that his usually steady hand was trembling. She put out one of hers, and laid it on his just for an instant.

"No," she said; "you shan't tell me anything. I am an intrusive brute."

Keston drew back from her light touch, paused nearly a moment, and then said, almost calmly:

"On the contrary, I think it is very good of you to interest yourself in me. There is very little to tell. The

first thing that I can remember was the sound of my father's voice, and the joy that always came to me when I realized that he was in the house. I am not sure that it is a good thing for children to be taught to love as I loved my father : it makes the—the afterwards so awful to bear ! If I live to be a hundred I shall never forget what I suffered when I went to school ; and I know now it must have been even worse for him. I was all he had."

There flashed before Drusilla's eyes the vision of that woman's photograph she had looked at when she had been in Yorkshire, and she understood.

"But he sent me to school when I was ever such a little chap," said Brian Keston, "because he knew that I had to be hardened ; and when I was there I worked with one idea in my mind—to make myself possible so that I could help him. Even then I realized how unfit he was to grapple with the hardships, the sordid struggles, of a professional literary life. I wanted to work for him ; I wanted to earn the money ; I wanted to give him freedom, space, room, to let his genius shape itself in proper form."

As he spoke, he was still placing the papers in the desk, but Drusilla saw that his hands moved mechanically ; his mind, his memory was chained to the past.

"Unfortunately there was always a demand for money in my home. My mother had been brought up luxuriously. She had not the least idea how to economize, just as she never grasped the significance of the burden my father carried. I am not blaming her," Keston said, looking for an instant at Drusilla : "she was never anything more than a child. It was not her fault. I have a sort of idea," he added after a little pause, with the faintest and the bitterest of smiles breaking the gravity of his lip for a moment, "that you know the rough outlines of my story, for your aunt, Mrs. Lingfield, claimed to have had

acquaintance with my father and mother the first time I met her here."

Drusilla coloured faintly.

"Yes," she said; "Aunt Edith did talk about you, but she said nothing unkind, for a wonder! She only told me that your father had been ruined because he had been persuaded by some unscrupulous friend to invest everything he had in a disastrous speculation. If I were you," said Drusilla, "I should hate that man." She spoke with fire, and Keston looked at her for an instant with that same fire, reflected in his eye.

"I have grown tired," he said, "of cursing George Spanrith! If it had only been misfortune, if the man had been honest, if he had believed in himself! But he was such a cur, such a traitor! And he managed to get off before the storm broke. My dear father believed in him up to the very, very last, till it was written in such big, black letters that even *his* faith-blinded eyes were forced to read and his loyal heart was forced to grasp the truth. That was the stuff he was made of, the father I adored, the father I lost!"

He turned away abruptly, and Drusilla, without another word, made her way to the door and passed out.

Her lips were trembling and her heart was beating unevenly. Though she had laughed and chatted about him often enough to her sister, she had never really troubled herself about Brian Keston one way or the other. Now she felt as though she could never be indifferent to him again, as if she would never lose the pathos of the story she had just heard.

The passionate depths of his nature which had just been revealed to her gave the real significance to his silent, his almost morose, ordinary bearing.

When she reached her bedroom she sat down in an

arm-chair and closed her eyes. It was in Drusilla's nature to yearn to give consolation in misery, solace in suffering, and it hurt her to realize that no one, herself included, could help this man. "Because he will never forget," she said to herself, "and that is really the beautiful part of it. I should hate him if he even tried to forget."

Her sister tapped at the door and came in whilst she was still sitting lost in this sombre view of thought.

"Why, dearest," said Bertha Heronworth, "I thought you were coming down again directly! This is a telegram from Connie. They are starting for Cairo immediately; and I wondered——"

"Oh, Beth," said Drusilla, getting up quickly, "can't we go to town to-night? I feel as if I must see Uncle Edmund before he goes away."

"I was just going to suggest this," said Bertha Heronworth; "but it will be a great rush. And you expect Jim here to-morrow, don't you?"

"I can send him a wire. He can meet us in town instead. Let us go, Beth! I should love it."

After a little discussion, Miss Heronworth agreed to the suggestion, and then began to move towards the door. Half way there, however, she turned back.

"Is anything the matter, dearest?" she asked gently.

Drusilla flushed slightly, and touched her eyes.

"I've been crying. When I left you, I went to the library, and—I am sure I don't know how it happened—but I made Mr. Keston tell me about his father, and, as I listened, I couldn't help crying."

A curious expression flashed across Bertha Heronworth's face. If that expression had been put into words, it would have startled Drusilla. Not for an instant did the girl imagine that this simple statement of a simple fact had sent a pang—almost a jealous one—through Bertha's

heart. Indeed, Drusilla's next words proved how very far she was from even imagining how precious was all that appertained to Brian Keston in her sister's eyes.

"I suppose he has spoken to you—he has told you about himself and his father?"

Bertha did not answer immediately; then she said:

"No; he has never spoken about himself."

"Well," said Drusilla, gradually drifting back to her normal self, "he is really rather like a hero of a romance. I gathered that from what Aunt Edith told me. It seems she knew his mother and father long ago, and I think she said she knew the man who ruined them; but I didn't listen very attentively, because it seems to me that Aunt Edith has known everybody who has ever lived. I believe," said Drusilla, laughing, "that if you gave her the proper encouragement she would tell you that she had had Cain to lunch one Sunday, and his brother Abel to dine during the week."

Bertha Heronworth smiled faintly.

"Which train shall we go up by this afternoon?" she queried. And Drusilla, impulsive as ever, voted for an early departure. "I don't know why, but I feel rather nervous and excited," she said. "It will do me good to move. If you don't mind, Beth, I'll come down to lunch in this get-up, and perhaps I'll have a sharp canter again after lunch. Mr. Keston upset me," she added a little abruptly. And all at once she shivered. "It is a horrible thing, Beth, to hear a good man—and I am convinced Mr. Keston is a good man—say in cold blood that he has grown weary of cursing another man!"

Bertha Heronworth winced.

"Did he say that?" she asked in a very suppressed tone.

"Yes," said Drusilla; "he said he had grown weary of

cursing George Spanrith, the man whose treachery really killed his father."

The girl had walked towards the window, and stood there a moment. She went on speaking mechanically, and when she turned from the window she stared about her in surprise. She had imagined she was speaking to her sister, but the room was empty. Bertha must have gone away very quietly.

CHAPTER XI.

It was a fact, as Drusilla would put it, "patent to the meanest intelligence," that Mrs. Lingfield was by no means pleased to see her nieces. She gave them the coldest greeting, and her manner was so ill-tempered as to temporarily chill even Drusilla's unfailing light-heartedness.

Connie Lingfield did her best to make amends for her stepmother's lack of cordiality; her efforts were not successful, however.

"But what is one," said Drusilla to herself, "among so many? I have often called Aunt Edith a host in herself, and to-night I realize how true this is."

Mrs. Lingfield was very firm in her refusal to permit either Bertha or Drusilla to see her husband.

"Edmund must not be disturbed," she said. "He has been very unwell for more than a week, and has a long, tiring journey in front of him, and he needs a good night's rest. If he knows that you are here he will insist on seeing you, and then he will get excited."

At this Drusilla lost her patience a little.

"But we have come to town on purpose to see Uncle Edmund," she said "and I don't believe we should excite him. Why should we excite him? We are not a circus."

Bertha had made no protest, but as Mrs. Lingfield got up and went out of the room (in lofty indignation apparently

at Drusilla's speech) she followed her aunt in her halting fashion.

The moment Drusilla and her cousin were alone Miss Lingfield exclaimed :

"How ill Bertha looks !"

„ To her surprise, Drusilla seized her by her two shoulders and shook her violently ; then she kissed her.

"I had to do it," she said, and she laughed, but there were tears in her eyes. "Yes ; she *is* ill. I have tried to pretend to myself that there is nothing the matter, but it is no use pretending any longer. Connie ! Beth is fretting horribly, and all about me."

Miss Lingfield was on the floor, searching for her scattered hairpins.

It was a matter of sharp regret to her now that she had spoken so frankly. But in truth she had seen something in Bertha Heronworth's face which had startled her when Drusilla and her sister had arrived. She tried her best to get out of the difficulty.

"I don't think I ought to have said 'ill.'"

"Put it how you like," said Drusilla, "it amounts to the same thing."

She sighed sharply, and, standing in front of the fire, she stared into it with such a shadow on her face as Connie Lingfield had never seen there before. All at once, however, her sunny smile came.

"I really wanted to shake Aunt Edith," she said. "Connie, it would give me the greatest satisfaction in the world to bring down *her* hair ! You know it is her fault that Beth is fretting so much. I make that accusation quite surely. I haven't anything to go upon, but I feel convinced that in some way or other Aunt Edith is annoying Beth. Of course, the idea of losing me is upsetting enough, without being bothered by other people. Oh,

dear ! sometimes I feel inclined to break off my engagement."

"It takes two to break off an engagement," said Miss Lingfield in her demure way, as she rearranged her hair. "We had your Jim here this afternoon, Drusilla ; he called unexpectedly. Mother was awfully nice to him, really and truly nice ; but I defy her to have been anything else. He is such a lamb—I am in love with him myself. There is only one explanation, Drusilla, the one I gave you in the beginning, for mother's funny little ways. She is jealous."

"But God bless my soul !" exclaimed Drusilla, "she can't marry Jim ! Or does she want him to start a harem ?"

The door opened at that moment, and Bertha Heronworth came back.

"I think we must go, darling," she said to Drusilla. "I have been trying to persuade Aunt Edith to let me see Uncle Edmund, if only for a moment, but she refuses absolutely."

There was a pathetic—a drawn—look on the elder sister's face.

"I wish I could do something," said Connie Lingfield impulsively.

"You can kiss him for both of us," said Drusilla, "and you can tell him that we are miserable because we haven't seen him. I thought we should all have had dinner together to-night, and been ever so jolly." And then Drusilla changed her tone and spoke seriously and composedly : "After all, Beth, perhaps Aunt Edith is right. Uncle Edmund has been ill, and he has a tremendous journey in front of him ; he ought to have all the rest he can get. We must be reasonable."

"He will be awfully disappointed when he knows he has

missed you," said Connie Lingfield ; " far more than you can ever understand, for he is very fond of you both. Now, if *I* wanted to be jealous I should have some cause ! "

The sisters drove back to their hotel in the four-wheeler, saying nothing ; but it surprised Drusilla to realize how easy it was to feel both intensely bitter and furiously angry.

" It is past a joke," she said to herself.

Indeed, she felt something more than anger against her aunt. There was a resentful feeling. Ever since she could remember, Drusilla had been annoyed by Mrs. Lingfield ; but it had been reserved for this moment to reveal how little pretence of affection there was between them.

As they passed into the hotel Bertha said : " You telegraphed to Jim ? "

" Yes. I think he ought to be here about now. I didn't make any arrangement about the evening, for of course I thought we should dine with Aunt Edith."

They went up in the lift in silence again, and when their rooms were reached Bertha passed into her bedroom and closed the door.

It was impossible now for Drusilla to disguise from herself that something was troubling her sister to which she had no direct clue. An explanation for Bertha's silence and disturbed mood might perhaps be found in the supposition that when she had followed Mrs. Lingfield out of the room there might have been an unpleasant discussion. " Only, Beth never quarrels," said Drusilla to herself.

She tossed off her furs and sat down on the hearthrug. A curious depression was settling upon her. She had been eager to get to London. A restless nervousness had driven her away from Crowder Chase ; now she felt she hated London and loathed this hotel-room, with its luxurious precision and its unhomelike atmosphere.

She made no effort to follow her sister. For the first time in her life she felt that Beth perhaps did not want her.

When there came a knock at the door, and Carlingford entered, Drusilla was crying. She got up very quickly and tried to hide her tears, but he saw them. He caught her by the two wrists and drew her into his arms.

"Something is wrong," he said. "What is it?"

Drusilla did not answer at first; she just rested in his embrace; then she said:

"Can't I cry if I want to?"

And very decisively he answered: "No;" adding, "At least, not unless I know why."

"Tyrant!" said Drusilla, but there was no spirit in her voice.

The man stood and pressed his cheek against the soft hair. He held her protectingly, as he would have held a little child, and in a few moments Drusilla gave a sigh.

"I'm better now," she said.

He loosened his arms, and she stood a little apart, and then he kissed her.

"And now you are going to tell me all there is to tell," he said.

"It is such a little 'all,' and there is nothing new in it. I daresay you wonder why we rushed up to town? It was because Connie sent us a telegram saying that she and her father and Aunt Edith were leaving for Cairo immediately. Beth and I at once decided to come up. We wanted so badly to see Uncle Edmund. Who knows—perhaps we may never see him again? And we went there, and Aunt Edith was perfectly beastly to us, Jim. Do you know, she won't let us see him! It seems too ridiculous, but she won't. I believe Beth tried ever so hard, all to

no good. I could have slapped Aunt Edith. As it was, I shook poor Connie "

Carlingford frowned slightly. He had been very directly conscious of Mrs. Lingfield's unsympathetic attitude towards Drusilla ; and in the course of his visit that afternoon he had hit on the very strange idea that this aunt of Drusilla's was cherishing some strange cause of resentment against the girl. Naturally, nothing had been said by Mrs. Lingfield to lead him to that conclusion, but he had arrived at it none the less surely.

It was a matter which would have troubled him very little indeed had it not been for Drusilla herself. But it took on an important shape when he saw tear-stains on the face he loved, and realized that Mrs. Lingfield's curious animosity had thrown a very definite shadow on Drusilla's happiness. In fact, she put this into words, even as the thought passed through his mind.

"I didn't come to town only to see Uncle Edmund. I came because I wanted to rush Beth away. I am awfully bothered about her, Jim, and I thought it would do her no end of good to come up to town only for a few hours. Now, of course, that is all knocked on the head. Thanks to Aunt Edith we are both miserable."

"Don't talk nonsense!" said Carlingford a little sharply. "Look here, Drusilla: don't bother your head any more about your aunt. I have a message for you from my sister Flora. She is in town, as it happens; and when she heard that you were coming up, nothing would satisfy her but that she must see you to-night. She wants us to dine with her."

"I can't eat any dinner," said Drusilla mournfully. "I really have a fit of the blues. If you know of a nice convenient churchyard I will go and spend a few hours in it."

"It isn't a big party," said Lord Carlingford, "but Flora told me that she had some odds and ends of people coming in after dinner, and I believe she has some sort of entertainment on—thought-reading or conjuring, or something of that sort."

Drusilla clapped her hands.

"Oh, Jim! how lovely! And shall I know all you are thinking about?"

"You know that already," the man said as he took her in his arms again.

"I am not so sure," said Drusilla. "I remember——" But then with half a sigh and half a laugh she broke off. "It is so nice," she said, "to realize that some one cares as you do. You will never change, will you, Jim?"

He only smiled down at her.

"People do change."

"Well, that is a subject you should know something about," said Carlingford, "for you are the most chameleon-like person I have ever known. Honestly I am never sure of you."

"Jim!" said Drusilla.

"Fact."

She tried to shake him, but he stood the assault calmly, and, taking her face in his two hands, he kissed it again and again.

"Anyhow, I am going to make as sure of you as I can," he said, "and sooner than we arranged. It is practically settled that I shall go out with the Duke on this tour of inspection to the Colonies as one of his staff, and I am not going without you."

"Sometimes," said Drusilla, half in earnest, "I am a little afraid of you, Jim. I do wish you had been a bank-clerk or somebody poor and of no account; then I should have felt that you really did belong to me, but——" She

broke off. "I had better go and tell Beth about to-night. I have a sort of idea that she will want to back out of going ; but we must be firm."

"Oh, she must come !" said Carlingford.

Miss Heronworth, however, fell in with the arrangement.

"I would rather have had dinner here," she said ; "but we must not refuse Lady Torchester's first invitation." A little later she said to her sister : "I am going to send Catherine with a note for Uncle Edmund. I shall put it under cover to Connie ; otherwise, perhaps Aunt Edith would not give it to him."

"She is a cat !" said Drusilla hotly. "Let us try and forget her. At least, if she is horrid to us, she is good to Uncle Edmund. Now I want to look my best. Beth, do come and tell me what I ought to wear."

Lord Carlingford had gone away, promising to call back for them in his sister's carriage ; and they spent quite a pleasant ten minutes passing Drusilla's wardrobe in critical inspection.

"Wear white," was Miss Heronworth's decision, "and do your hair the way I like."

The elder sister was dressed before Drusilla, and was waiting in the sitting-room when Carlingford ran up.

"I have something to say to you, Jim," Miss Heronworth said a little hurriedly—in fact, a little nervously. "I want to tell you that I have changed my mind ; that for many reasons I don't want you to have a long engagement."

Carlingford looked at her for a moment, and then he kissed her.

"Thank you, dear," he said. "As a matter of fact, I was going to have five minutes' chat with you to-night, if possible. Something has cropped up which makes it

imperative that we should marry much sooner than we arranged."

Then he told her of the impending and almost certain appointment, and Bertha drew a deep breath as she listened.

"We will fix the wedding-day whenever you want it to be, Jim," she said ; and then the subject was dismissed as the door opened and Drusilla came in.

CHAPTER XII.

WHEN Lady Torchester had first heard of her brother's engagement she had been inclined to take the matter rather badly; in fact, she planned more than one indignant letter protesting against what she regarded as Carlingford's madness.

Lady Torchester had devoted a good deal of thought to the question of her brother's marriage. She was very fond of him; proud of his good looks, of his splendid qualities as a soldier, and naturally of his position, both present and in the future. There were very few women, in Lady Torchester's opinion, who were deserving of the honour of being her brother's wife; and so to be suddenly informed that he had chosen for himself, and chosen a girl about whom she knew absolutely nothing, was really in its way a blow. Even her parents' warm and sympathetic appreciation of Drusilla left Lady Torchester unmoved. Of course, she was very glad that Jim was going to marry money, for money was wanted so badly; but money was not everything. However, finding that the matter was settled, and that her brother had no intention of changing his views to please her, she tried to make the best of the matter, and she resolved to meet Drusilla as pleasantly as possible. And the coming of Drusilla was an agreeable disappointment. Lady Torchester had

been prepared to see a pretty girl, but Drusilla's loveliness took her breath away. Before the dinner was over she had to confess to herself she quite understood her brother's infatuation. Both the Miss Heronworths, in fact, produced an agreeable impression on her.

Although she was only in town for a week of Christmas shopping, Lady Torchester's big house was open; and what she had called a little party swelled, before the evening was over, into a large crowd.

Though she was hardly aware of it, Drusilla was really the centre of interest to nearly everyone present. She was not shy, but her manner was a little subdued as, one after another, people were brought up to her and introduced. After a while she found herself sitting beside a small woman wearing a white satin gown, a coronet of diamonds on her elaborately dressed hair, and any amount of jewels around her throat and neck.

Lady Draycott introduced herself.

"I am so glad to see you, Miss Heronworth," she said. "I missed you when I went down to Crowder Chase the other day to see my boy."

Drusilla said something, she hardly knew what. She was looking at Brian Keston's mother, at the little, pinched and painted parody of a face, at all the jewels which could not hide the ravages of advancing age; and her heart gave a thud as memory swept her back to the library at home, and she remembered how Keston had looked as he had spoken about his father. Even now the tone of his voice had power to hurt her. There came to Drusilla a distinct repugnance for this little creature sitting beside her.

Lady Draycott was happily quite unconscious of this. She merely thought Drusilla shy and rather stupid, and in consequence she chatted away with extra briskness.

"And how is my poor, dear, quixotic Brian?" she inquired, after a little. "I have not heard from him just lately."

"I think Mr. Keston is quite well. He is working all the time. My sister does not know really what she would have done without him. He has been most invaluable."

Lady Draycott laughed.

"So kind of you, dear Miss Heronworth, to put it like that," she said; "but, of course, I can't pretend to be pleased with Brian. He has offended all his father's people; and Sir William has grown tired of protesting against his peculiar views. Brian has put himself out of touch with everything which really belongs to him."

"Mr. Keston is an enthusiast," said Drusilla, trying not to speak coldly. "I don't suppose he would ever be happy unless he were working."

"But that is such a bourgeois idea," said Lady Draycott, with her small, shrill laugh. "Perhaps I am out of the fashion, but my creed is that people like ourselves have great duties and obligations to themselves. Work very often means a great degree of selfishness. Now, if Brian had let me shape his life, he would not be where he is now. But," said Lady Draycott hurriedly, "I am speaking to you most confidentially. I never discuss Brian; indeed, very few people know that I have a grown-up son. I expect very few would believe it if they were to see Brian. I don't look very much like his mother, do I?"

"No," said Drusilla; "you certainly do not."

And just then Carlingford came across the room, and she gave almost an audible sigh of relief.

"Getting tired?" the young man asked as Lady Draycott took herself and her long white train and her gleaming jewels away.

"Not tired," Drusilla said ; then she added impulsively :
"What an odious little woman !"

"Who—Rosalie Draycott ? Oh ! she is very harmless, a mass of vanity, but not a bad sort."

"Well, I think her odious," said Drusilla with conviction. "I am sure if I were to see her very often I should be rude to her. I hate shams !"

Carlingford looked at the girl a little curiously. He had never heard her speak in this way before, and he felt he hardly understood her mood. He had no particular liking for Lady Draycott, but at the same time he thought Drusilla rather hard on a woman whose only fault appeared to be a silly form of vanity.

"Flora is complaining she has not had a chance to speak to you. She wants you to lunch with her alone to-morrow. I'll entice Beth to come out with me : we have lots of little things to talk over and arrange. Will you lunch with Flora ?"

"If you will promise to be very good to Beth," said Drusilla, "I will do everything you want."

He took her hand for an instant unseñ, and gripped it in a way that brought the colour flushing into her cheeks and made her heart beat.

"Dearest and sweetest !" he said. "And now come along and say good-bye. Beth looks awfully tired, and I am going to take you back to the hotel."

Lady Torchester's motor-car was waiting for them, and made short work of the homeward journey.

Lord Carlingford said "Good-bye" to them at the door of the lift.

"I will be round first thing in the morning," he said, "and we will go for a walk."

The sisters parted with a tender kiss.

"Promise me that you are going to sleep," Drusilla

said. And when Bertha answered a little hurriedly: "Why should I ~~not~~ sleep?" the other girl prevaricated.

"Oh, I know you hate moving about. You will miss your own room and your own bed, and the quietness and everything. I don't mind a noise. Beth, I am waking up!"

"Just when you ought to be going to sleep," said Bertha with ~~her~~ faint smile.

"I mean," said Drusilla, as she slipped out of her wrap. "I am waking up in spirit. I am beginning to feel that life is a complex thing; that there is far, far more in even commonplace, everyday things than I have ever imagined. No," the girl said rather abruptly, "I know what you are going to say! You are going to tell me my life need be nothing but a bed of roses, but I don't mean to have it like that, Beth! Even roses have their thorns, you know." Then, in her familiar way of twisting from a subject, she said: "What do you think of my future sister? She looks a little like Jim sometimes. If she were tall she would be handsome. They all think a great deal of Flora. She told me to-night she and Jim were the two who had always been together from the schoolroom days. I wonder if she likes me?"

"Why should you doubt?" asked Bertha quickly.

"I don't doubt. I only wonder. Now you really must get to bed. Good night, dear, dear Beth! Kiss me, and dream sweetly."

In her own room Drusilla dismissed the maid Catherine, with strict injunctions to look carefully after her mistress.

"I have a sort of idea that Miss Bertha will not sleep well. I know she is upset, Catherine. She wanted so much to see Mr. Lingfield. You managed to get her letter delivered?"

"I gave it to Miss Connie herself, miss. She sent you all sorts of messages."

Huddled up in her pink silk dressing-gown Drusilla planted herself in a chair immediately in front of the fire. For some reason or other, bed seemed right out of the question.

"I suppose this is inevitable," she said to herself with a little, restless catch. "If Jim hadn't come, everything would have gone on just the same. Sometimes I feel as if the old part of me had had much the best time; and yet—and yet," she said to herself, slipping her foot down and sitting bolt upright, "if I even try and picture to myself what life would be without Jim, I feel frightened."

She sat and stared up at the ledge above the fireplace.

Catherine had placed the few pet photographs which Drusilla always carried about with her on this ledge. "There was a miniature of Bertha, a portrait of her father and mother and two of Carlingford.

"By every right," said Drusilla to herself as she looked at her lover's pictured face, "I ought to care more for Bertha than for you, but you seem to have taken everything. Nothing compares with what you are!" Then Drusilla said to herself, brushing back her hair from her brow: "I wish it wasn't like this! I wish I did not care so much! It is wrong to care so much. That is what Kitty Deravan said about her children and Brian Keston about his father. I didn't want Jim, and when he came I tried to put him out of my life; but now! Now! . . . Now! . . ."

She got up and took the nearest photograph from the ledge and she stood with it pressed, not to her lips, but to her heart; and as she stood there, with her eyes closed, there came to her that same feeling which she had expressed to her sister when she had told Beth of her

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betrothal, the feeling that what she had was too much, that she had more than her share ; and with this feeling there mingled also a yearning to express her gratitude in some noble way, to lift herself out of the frothy happiness of her childhood and shape herself anew, finding fresh significance even in the commonplace things of life and duty everywhere !

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CHAPTER XIII.

CARLINGFORD arrived so early the next morning at the hotel that he breakfasted with Drusilla and her sister. Afterwards, he carried off the younger girl for a brisk walk in the Park, despite the fact that Drusilla protested that she had done none of her Christmas shopping.

"Oh, Beth will do that for you. Won't you, Beth?"

So Drusilla handed a long list to her sister. And, just as she was going away, she said:

"I haven't put down Mr. Keston's name on that list, but you might get something for him, Beth. I'll tell you what: I might as well give him my photograph, in a nice leather frame."

But to this Lord Carlingford objected.

"Certainly not," he said. "Give him the frame, if you like, but not the photograph."

He spoke quite decidedly; but Drusilla only laughed.

"All important personages give their photographs," she said; "and as the future Lady Carlingford——"

"Come along!" said Lord Carlingford. And he took her away.

The sun was shining, but the wind was very bleak; and they had to walk quickly to get warm.

"This braces me up," said Drusilla. "Did you notice

how sleepy I was when you came this morning? Well, that was because I was awake all night."

"Awake!" said Carlingford quickly. "What kept you awake?"

And she answered him promptly.

"You—yes, you!" she said, as they turned into the Park gates. "You are an awful anxiety to me, Jim. All sorts of things force me to see that we have made a mistake in being in such a hurry; but——"

She paused.

"I should like to know what that 'but' means," Carlingford said good-humouredly. And she blushed.

Her next remark was a question.

"How many of those women who were there last night have you been in love with?"

"Last night? What! at Flora's? Oh! probably all of them. A boy, as a rule, falls in love every other day."

"Well, I'm jealous, horribly jealous, Jim. I want to be your first love."

"So you are, my dearest," he answered her gently.

"Because," he added, "you are veritably the first woman I have met in whom I see my wife."

"Just for curiosity," said Drusilla, "tell me what you want your wife to be."

He did not answer her immediately.

"I want a woman whom I can love not for a week or a month only, but for always. I want a woman I can trust. I want a woman who tells the truth, and who is loyal. I want a woman who will put her hand in mine, and who will go with me wherever I am called. I want a woman who will be a mother—a real mother. I want a woman who will grow old with me! And all these things I know I shall find in you, Drusilla."

"Oh, Jim!" she said brokenly, and she turned her face

from him, because the tears were running down her cheeks.

It seemed to her that he had voiced all those nameless longings which had possessed her the night before, and yet he saddened her.

"Suppose I fail in all this? Suppose, with the very best intentions in the world, I fail?"

They had left the deserted Row, and were out in the open part of the Park now.

He took her hand from the muff and drew it through his arm.

"You won't fail," he said briskly. "You have the stuff in you, Drusilla, that makes the ideal woman. Look at the people from whom you came—your father and your grandfather and your great-grandfather. With such records, such splendid human documents, such honest, straightforward, clean lives behind you, it would be strange if you should fail. Beth has kept you a child all these years, though she has taken on her own shoulders burdens and responsibilities which many a man carries; and I want to keep you a child too in one respect, but for all other reasons I want you to grow into the woman I know you will be. You said last night you wished I had been just a simple working man; well, I am going to work. There are just as many possibilities for people like ourselves to work and to rise as for those who start with so much less than we have. My firm opinion is that you could be as earnest a worker as any woman in the world. Now let us come to the things of the moment. Whilst you are lunching with Flora I am going to fix up things with Beth. I want you to agree to our marriage in January. Of course, I shan't urge this, but personally I should have liked a quiet wedding."

"I should like an elopement," said Drusilla.

He stopped and swung her round till he looked into her face, that had at this moment a sweeter, lovelier look, because of the tear-stains and the quivering of the lips.

"No? Really?"

She broke into her radiant smile.

"Yes, really—honestly and truly. It would save such a lot of bother. But I suppose people would be horrified."

"I don't know that we need trouble about other people," said Carlingford. "However, don't say anything to Flora to-day. Of course, she would like a very grand affair, but I fancy we shall get our way with Beth."

"Beth has always done what I wanted," said Drusilla. "Please be awfully nice to her to-day; she is growing so fond of you—you have a way of making people fond of you," said Drusilla.

He laughed, and then he said half seriously:

"Tell me how much you love me."

She opened her arms very widely.

"That much!"

And after that they talked happy nonsense, and stayed out in the bleak wind, feeling none of its bleakness, conscious of neither time nor other tiresome things, till a far-away clock struck an hour and the wind brought the sound to them.

"And, by Jove, we must go!" said Carlingford. And they almost ran out of the Park.

He took Drusilla into his sister's house, and when they were alone in the shadows in the bend of the staircase he kissed her.

"I'll come and fetch you," he said. "Don't be afraid of Flora. She has quite lost her heart to you, and she is really a good little sort in her way."

He left her, and then he went back to her again, and stole another kiss.

"You are quite happy?" he asked her.

"Quite! Oh, so happy, Jim!"

Their hands clung together as they parted, the hearts of both were thrilling.

Drusilla was rather glad that she had to wait a little while for Lady Torchester. She was grateful for a few moments' quietness. In the last hour she had looked on a new phase of her lover's nature. Yet, as she paused to recall all he had said, she realized that she was not in the least surprised to find that a vein of serious import lay like a foundation beneath the charm, the light-heartedness, and the passion of the man. Nevertheless, there was here matter which called for thought.

Carlingford's words to her out in the Park, those simple yet heartfelt words of faith in her, were unutterably sweet, but they added another to the many responsibilities which were closing in about Drusilla, and Drusilla was so new to responsibility. It seemed to her now that she had never thought independently, much less moved or acted of her own free will.

Life had been ordained for her by her sister; and she had just rippled on in a sunny, irresponsible way, conscious of neither shadows nor sorrows, conscious of nothing deep or earnest, content to let Bertha guide her and guard her as though, indeed, she had been nothing more than a little child. Even now, though Beth had receded a little into the background, Drusilla could hardly picture an intimate home-life without her.

In her calm, unpretentious way Bertha Heronworth was so strong, so wise.

"I can't imagine Beth making a mistake," Drusilla said to herself now, as she sat waiting for her future sister-in-law to join her; "whilst I—I shall make mistakes by the thousand! It is very lovely of Jim to believe I am every-

thing he wants me to be ; but, oh, I *wish* he didn't believe it—at least, not all ! I shall have to get Beth to ask him not to put me on a pedestal ; for, if he does, I know one fine day something will happen. I shall give a lurch, and then there will be an awful fall, and I shall smash up all my happiness ! ”

Carlingford insisted on taking Beth out to lunch.

“ I know of an awfully quiet little place,” he said, “ where we can eat what Drusilla would call mysterious food, and we can talk to our hearts' content.”

As they started off Miss Heronworth apologized for being rather dull.

“ London never suits me. Unless you want us to stay longer, I think we will go back home at once.”

“ Go back, certainly,” the young man answered.

He was so affectionate, so tender with Beth ; and, in truth, he felt more closely drawn to her. It seemed to him that there was something working in her heart over and above her natural reluctance to separate from her sister. Though the idea might seem ridiculous, it certainly dawned on Carlingford's mind, as he glanced now and then at Beth's small, wistful face, that she was worried.

“ You are not fretting, are you ? ” he asked her once, going to the point in a frank way.

She said : “ Yes and no ; but I am no longer selfish. I want, as I told you last night, to take back all my restrictions.”

Indeed, she discussed the immediate future quite eagerly, and seemed enchanted with the idea of the young married people going abroad. Once, however, she looked at Carlingford a little anxiously.

“ You will be very patient with Drusilla, won't you ? ” she said. “ You will try and remember that she has been

very, very much cherished. I am not sure, Jim, that she is altogether fit as yet for big social duties. She may make mistakes."

"I am not afraid," said Carlingford, with a happy smile of confidence. "And, besides, even if she did blunder now and then, she is only a girl. I am going to take the greatest care of her, Beth. I am going to try and make her find in me everything that you have been to her; and I wish from the bottom of my heart—I wish that I could just let you know how grateful I am to you for your faith in me. Oddly enough," he added the next moment, "Drusilla was saying just what you have been saying this morning; but I told her that it wasn't possible that she could ever fail; that, coming from such people as she does, she can't help being what she is—the sweetest, the best, the purest in heart and mind."

Bertha Heronworth sat looking down at the coarse, white tablecloth. She saw everything so clearly, and yet she was separated from everything about her. Once again her spirit, the spirit inherited from those dead people whom Carlingford had just spoken about with so much reverence and enthusiasm, clamoured to be heard. It was a moment rare with possibility, a moment that perhaps might never come again. Edmund Lingfield had counselled silence. His argument had been based on practical knowledge of life; yet, though Beth had taken his counsel, her heart had not been satisfied. She knew now that it would never be satisfied. Yet, even as she paused, the moment passed, and the chance was gone.

Carlingford was talking eagerly of his plans, of that very quiet marriage ceremony, which would be very pleasant to both Drusilla and himself, and after that he began talking about Beth herself.

"I want you to go to Yorkshire after we are married.

My mother is eager for you to go to her. I wish you would promise me this," he said. "You ought to be great friends, you two; and this arrangement would make the child so happy."

"I can't make any definite promises," Beth answered. "I think I shall be happier alone just at first, but I shall go to your mother when you and Drusilla are away." Then she mustered up courage to speak to him about money. "Mr. Lethbridge will be writing you in a day or two," she said. "He will act as a trustee for Drusilla. She knows nothing about money." Then she added, as she rose from the table and let Carlingford put her furs about her: "I shall settle half I have on Drusilla."

The young man said nothing. He took her back to the hotel, vaguely wishing that he could devise some means of dispelling the sadness which undoubtedly had possession of her. It was not until he was alone that he recalled what she had said about the settlements. It struck him then as strange that it should be necessary for Bertha Heronworth to make settlements at all. He had not given the matter any real thought, but still he had supposed, in a vague way, that Drusilla was rich—that she probably had her own share in the fortune which the late George Heronworth had left. Yet Bertha Heronworth's words had been distinctly to the effect that she had given her sister half of what she possessed.

"I suppose," said Carlingford to himself, "that as she was the elder daughter, she took the lot."

And after that he thought no more of the matter, but, after dawdling about a little while at his club, went to fetch Drusilla.

He found his sister alone, and just a little aggrieved.

"We were having such a delightful time, and getting on so well," said Lady Torchester, "when everything was

spoilt. Miss Heronworth sent a message to say she wanted Drusilla at once, as she had received very bad news of an uncle—Uncle Edmund, I believe, Drusilla called him."

"Oh, I must go back and see what has happened!" said Carlingford. And he hurried away again without loss of time.

When he reached the hotel, however, he was kept waiting a little while in the sitting-room; and when Drusilla came to him her eyes were tear-stained.

"Oh, Jim," she said, "Uncle Edmund is dead; and I simply don't know what to do for Beth! She is broken-hearted. He was so much to her; in some ways, more even than I am. And the thing that hurts," said Drusilla brokenly, "is that she wanted so much to see him. Wasn't it cruel of Aunt Edith not to let us see him last night?"

It was very comforting to be held in his strong arms, and they stood for a moment or two without speaking, and then Carlingford said:

"What do you want to do? Must you stay in town?"

"I want to take Beth back home at once," said Drusilla. "There is really nothing that we can do, and now I don't want to meet Aunt Edith. I can't help feeling that somehow it was all to spite me that she would not let Beth see Uncle Edmund last night. She is so odd with me. If we could do anything for poor Connie I would stay, but here again I am sure Aunt Edith will interfere; so we had better go home, and you'll come soon, won't you?"

"I will follow you to-morrow or next day," said Carlingford, "unless you would like me to go down with you?"

But Drusilla shook her head at this. She seemed to think that her sister would prefer to travel alone.

"Catherine and I can manage quite well," she said, "and I shall feel happier about Beth when we are home again."

So half an hour later Carlingford took his leave, and before evening the Miss Heronworths had left London for the country.

CHAPTER XIV.

BACK at Crowder Chase life seemed just the same, and yet there was a great difference.

The death of Edmund Lingfield had cast a definite blight on both the sisters. In fact, Bertha Heronworth, who never yet had played the part of invalid, allowed herself to be kept a prisoner in her room; and though Drusilla fussed about her and did everything her tender thought could suggest to lift her sister's spirit, she felt not only that she failed absolutely, but she felt—and this in no indefinite way—at times that Beth was really better when she was left entirely alone.

Drusilla had sent Carlingford a telegram announcing their safe arrival, and in it she had added:

"Don't come down to-morrow. I will write to you."

And she did write. Her letters to him were very straightforward affairs. Read by a stranger, they might have seemed matter-of-fact, indifferent sort of epistles, but the man to whom they were written had grasped by this time the character of the girl who wrote, and to him they lacked nothing.

He obeyed her, because he knew she was thinking solely and simply of Bertha; and he felt it as a duty that he should in no way influence Drusilla in these the last few weeks that she and her sister were to be together.

In one of her letters Drusilla had written :

" I intend, if I possibly can, to prevent Beth going to the funeral. Up to the present, we have had neither sign nor word from Aunt Edith. It is Connie's maid who has sent me news. Connie, poor child, is prostrated with grief; and, indeed, I don't wonder—she and her father were so much to one another, and he *was* such a dear ! I want Connie to come to us, but I don't know now what will happen."

To walk to the village and post these letters was Drusilla's one little gleam of pleasure. She realized in these days a new fact about herself, which was that it was not easy for her to give expression to any great emotion. The proud kind of shyness which controlled her pen when she was writing to Carlingford had its root in the very depths of her nature, a restraint which was so utterly at variance with that bubbling, happy-go-lucky manner which had characterized her ever since she had been a child. To have to realize that she was capable of meeting, comprehending, and bearing responsibility was a new development. Inevitably there were moments when Drusilla regretted the transition from her former careless, sunny indifference to her present mental condition, which she dimly felt was only the birth of what she was destined to be; and, of course, she did not part with her old tricks all at once. When she realized little by little that Beth preferred to be alone she had recourse to the library.

" You have to put up with me, whether you like it or not," she said to Brian Keston. " If I stay alone I shall do something desperate ! "

For a long while she sat watching him as he worked, and then his industry got on her nerves.

"Can't you talk?" she asked once desperately. "You must be just a walking encyclopædia of knowledge. Why not share this knowledge? Suppose you instruct me? I know now I have everything to learn. I never went to school; and my dear old Charlotte Waters, who was my governess for I don't know how many years, used to wring her hands in despair over me. As it is," Drusilla said, "I never can remember if there are two 'p's' in 'disappointment.' Mr. Keston, do, *please*, take my education in hand."

"The first thing you ought to learn," said Brian Keston in his quiet way, "is patience."

And this brought Drusilla out of her chair.

"Patience!" she said. "My goodness! What have I to be patient for?" she asked in the same breath.

"Patience," said Keston in a low voice, "is really one form of unselfishness."

Drusilla walked the length of the room, looking at the big cases in which all the books were ranged in proper order.

"That means," she said, turning round suddenly and looking at him whilst she flushed, "that you must have discovered that I am selfish, Mr. Keston."

He looked at her just a moment, and said:

"You are human."

"And so, of course, I am crammed full of faults. Thank you," said Drusilla. Then she smiled at him. "But you are so right! And you know me better than most people, better even than Lord Carlingford, because *he* has made up his mind that I am a paragon of perfection—a woman absolutely incapable of doing the ordinary, foolish things that most women do; and he bases this idea to a great extent on the fact that my dead and gone

relations were such very estimable people. Do you believe in that theory ? ”

Keston continued writing for a few minutes, then said :

“ No. Undoubtedly in some cases heredity stands for a good deal, but the majority of people are, in my opinion, what circumstances or education have made them.”

“ I shall tell Jim what you say,” said Drusilla.

Just for an instant, Keston's lips curled ; and then he flushed.

“ Lord Carlingford will be very much obliged to you, I am sure,” he said.

“ I don't know if he will be,” Drusilla answered promptly, “ but I know I am. You have taken a load off my mind. Since I came back here, I have been trying to think how I could do big and noble deeds, to live up to the reputation of my ancestors. It has been fearfully depressing ; and you crushed me terribly just now, because, when I asked you to teach me how to spell ‘ disappointment,’ you declared I was selfish.”

She waited for him to say something ; but he made no reply, only plunged once again into the huge book of reference which stood on the table, and against which was the foolscap on which he was making notes. Suddenly a strange little sound broke the silence of the room. Putting down his pen again, and looking round, he saw that Drusilla was crying. He made one movement towards her, and then he paused ; and she, drying her eyes hastily, looked up at him.

“ Isn't it silly to cry ? ” she said. “ But—I don't know how to express it exactly—but Uncle Edmund's death has made me *afraid*. I feel as if everything that I knew so well—all the little, ordinary things of my every-

day life, I mean—have gone ! Is this what death means ? So many, many times I have heard of people dying ; I have seen those left behind wearing black, and looking sad ; and I have seen the open graves in the churchyard, but I never, never grasped what it all really meant ! Mr. Keston, I don't *want* to lose everything all at once ! Is that being selfish ? ”

“ No ! ” he answered. “ It is learning the truth.”

She smiled through her tears.

“ So after all you *are* educating me ! ” She dabbed her eyes anxiously, and then looked at him ; “ Do I look as if I had been crying ? I don't want Beth to ask questions, because I don't know how to answer them, unless I say to her I am weeping because Mr. Keston says I am a mass of selfishness.”

“ That,” he answered, smiling with difficulty, “ is not the truth.”

Drusilla rolled her handkerchief into a ball, and stuck it into her belt. Her frivolous mood, though it was not quite the real thing, came back to her fortunately at this moment.

“ You really are a useful person to have in the house,” she said. “ I shall treat you as a kind of clock, and, when I feel doubtful, I shall come and see whether I am doing right or wrong.”

He was looking at her with a curious expression in his eyes.

“ I am not sure if I am very useful,” he answered slowly, “ but I am quite sure that I will gladly be of use to you if ever you have need of me.”

“ Now, that is very nice of you,” said Drusilla ; “ and you mustn't blame me if I take you at your word. Well, I think I will go and see how Beth is. Good-bye, Mr. Keston. Don't think you've got rid of me, because I dare

say I shall come back again in five minutes. I've got the fidgets. I can't rest anywhere."

He rose, of course, to open the door, and she went out, not with any haste, however—dawdling, in fact—and pausing to say some words of endearment to Bob, who had apparently been sitting on the mat outside.

When she was gone, the man inside shut the door, and stood against it for a fraction of an instant; then with a shiver he went back to his work. But the monotony and the stillness seemed, for once, beyond him; and, flinging aside the pen, he turned down the light and went along the passage to his own room, closely followed by the dog.

CHAPTER XV.

By Mr. Lingfield's will, his daughter was to be at liberty to live with whom she liked, and where she liked, the father merely indicating a wish that he would like her to travel whenever the opportunity occurred.

He left his house in town and his money to his daughter, and all his other possessions to his wife, with the exception of some books and engravings to Bertha Heronworth, and a collection of miniatures and some jewels to Drusilla.

Mrs. Lingfield chose to be annoyed with the contents of her husband's will. His death had shocked her, and, just for a few days, whilst the gloom of his death pervaded her life so noticeably, she was really unhappy, and not unsympathetic to her stepdaughter; but the knowledge that Connie was now independent of her was quite sufficient to whip up all kinds of the latent forces. She had, in truth, always been jealous of Edmund Lingfield's love for his daughter, just as she had been resentful of his frankly declared affection for her nieces. She had carried this old resentment against Bertha so far as to exclude the Miss Heronworths from the funeral; and when, on being questioned, Connie confessed that her first move would be a visit to Crowder Chase, Mrs. Lingfield lost her temper completely.

"Of course, you are now mistress of your own actions," she said, "and can do what you like; but perhaps, when I tell you that I object very strongly to your staying with Bertha—at any rate, just now—this may have some weight with you."

Connie Lingfield listened in silence for a little while.

She was very sad, and she was far from well. In these first bleak days of grief, she had turned to the thought of Bertha and Drusilla Heronworth and their sympathy as to a kind of haven. Though she had not as yet confessed as much to herself, she was really eager to be away from her father's wife.

"Why don't you wish me to go, mother?" she asked.

And Mrs. Lingfield gave a prevaricating reason.

"I don't consider a visit to Crowder Chase will do you any good," she said. "Bertha is so depressing. You had far better go to your cousins in Hampshire." Then she added: "Business will take me to Crowder Chase very shortly, and, as we have to start our separate lives, we serve no good purpose by being there at the same time."

And so Connie Lingfield gave way, sacrificing her wishes, and changed her plans. She wrote a few lines to Drusilla:

"I wanted to come so much," she said, "but mother has put it into her head that she must go to Crowder Chase, and I think perhaps I would rather come later on by myself. Jim was here again yesterday. He has been so good to me. He told us of your decision to be married quietly, and so much sooner; and I want you to know, darling Drusilla, how glad I am. Mother was so nice to him."

Miss Lingfield underlined the word; and Drusilla under-

stood the other girl's eager desire to try and smooth away, if possible, the disagreeable feelings which Mrs. Lingfield's peculiar manner had aroused.

The news, however, that Connie was not coming, and that her stepmother might be expected, was most unpalatable.

Drusilla flared into a hot temper, and took the letter to her sister.

"I am convinced," said Drusilla, "that Aunt Edith has done something to prevent Connie coming. Beth dear, we must really have this out! It is all very well imagining this, and supposing that, but why *should* Aunt Edith be so catty? I was going to say beastly, but I suppose I had better not, although a cat is a beast, isn't it?" In the next breath Drusilla demanded: "Must she come here? I won't have her worrying you. If she has anything nasty to say, let her wait, and say it later."

"I am afraid," said Bertha, "we can hardly refuse to let her come."

"What!" asked Drusilla. "Not after all her horrid treatment of us? I don't recognize any obligation to Aunt Edith; and I tell you quite frankly, Beth, that I don't intend to have her at my wedding. She would be capable of stalking up the aisles and forbidding the banns, or something of that sort. Well, I suppose she can't forbid the banns exactly, but she would be sure to spoil everything; and I don't want my wedding to be spoiled," said Drusilla a little wistfully.

Miss Heronworth made no answer to this tirade. Truth to tell, she felt unequal to deal with the situation. Her uncle's death had been a veritable anguish, followed by a sense of lassitude and weakness such as had never come to her before. Edmund Lingfield had assured Beth more than

once that there was nothing among his private papers which could lead to the discovery of the secret they held so precious ; and there were times when Bertha Heronworth found herself clinging to the hope that her fears might only be the phantoms of her imagination, and that her aunt's present attitude might after all merely be the expression of that peevish jealousy which had characterized her throughout her life.

" I remember long ago," Miss Heronworth said to herself once, " that Aunt Edith was quite angry because old Lord Hursthaven fell so desperately in love with Drusilla when she was only a tiny, little mite. She was never jealous of me ; but I suppose she must have felt, even all these years ago, that Drusilla would not only be beautiful as a woman, but that her mind, her heart, her intellect, would put her in a very high place. And Aunt Edith is one of those who crave for high places without having to struggle for them. Happiness has always been just close to her hand, and yet she has always missed it. When Jim talks with homage for all those who stand behind us, he must surely have forgotten that Aunt Edith, too, comes from these people—Aunt Edith, who is so little-minded, and yet so hard ; so handsome in face, so plain in heart ! "

When it was definitely settled that Mrs. Lingfield was expected at Crowder Chase, Drusilla made no further protest. She resolved to go through whatever might come as patiently and as brightly as possible, purely on account of her sister.

Christmas arrived and passed, and was spent calmly enough, and not unhappily, at Crowder Chase.

After all, however, Brian Keston was not there. He went to London. His mother had written to him that she was not well ; and for this reason, and for some others,

which he did not tell even to himself, the young man left his work, and turned his back on everything that was now so beautiful to him.

For once he found that his mother had not exaggerated.

Lady Draycott was very unwell; and in her illness she turned to her eldest child in a way that was almost pathetic.

When they were alone one afternoon (Keston went each day to see her, though he would not stay in the house), Lady Draycott began speaking of his father. The subject was introduced naturally enough.

Lady Draycott had been discussing Crowder Chase and the Carlingford marriage. This had led her to the usual fretful objection to her son's position.

"I am sure, if your poor, dear father could know what you are doing, it would have broken his heart," she said. "He was so proud of you, Brian, he intended you to be something very big and great; and he was so clever, so brilliant, that you, as his son, ought to have taken a splendid place in the world."

It was impossible for Brian to say anything. He much preferred to let his mother speak out all that was stored in her heart; and it seemed to-day that she had some fresh material on which to speak.

"One or two people have been talking to me lately," she said, "about poor Richard, people whom we used to know; and I have come to the conclusion, Brian, that we were very badly advised—I mean that if your father had been a different kind of man, there would have been some money for us. You have met Mrs. Lingfield, haven't you, an aunt of Miss Heronworth's?"

Brian looked up.

"Yes. What of her?"

"She came to see me two days ago, reminding me that

we used to be friends at the time that you were a baby. She was talking all the time about your father and about the Spanriths. Do you know, Brian, she insists that there was money—that when George Spanrith died we ought to have got some of what we lost from the estate ? ”

Brian Keston caught his breath quickly.

“ I am awfully sorry, mother,” he said, “ that you have had all this old business stirred up again ; nothing can come of it. As far as I am concerned, even if there were piles of Spanrith’s money laid up somewhere, I would not touch a farthing of it.”

Lady Draycott moved fretfully on her pillows.

“ You are always like that,” she said—“ difficult, and pig-headed, and quixotic. If Spanrith could leave money to those belonging to him, he could give back some that he robbed from your father. Mrs. Lingfield promised to make inquiries for me.”

“ Mrs. Lingfield is a chattering busybody,” said Brian Keston hotly ; “ and I don’t understand why she should come and unearth all this old business. The past is done with. She can’t bring my father back to life, but she can do a lot of harm by upsetting you in this way.”

But when an idea took root in Lady Draycott’s mind, it was difficult to displace it.

“ If I could only have a little of what your father lost ! ” she said. And then there flashed into her voice a remembrance of an old spite. “ *I* had no jewels and pearls in those days ; but Helen Spanrith had everything she wanted ! He used to literally pour diamonds on her ! And such a house they had ! And the airs that she used to give herself ! She loved to pose as a kind of patroness of art. Anyhow, she used to keep open house for literary people and musicians, and journalists and painters, and was everlastingly having her portrait painted. • You

ought to remember her, but I don't suppose you do. She made a great fuss of you when you were a little boy."

"I remember her very distinctly," said Brian.

He got up to go. This subject did more than depress him: it brought him to quite a bitter feeling towards Mrs. Lingfield. He stood pausing by the fireside, lost in thought, whilst his mother talked on.

It was a long time since she had discussed old days; indeed, there had been times when Brian had felt that she had a nervous desire to avoid any mention of his father's name. On this occasion, however, she was persistent in talking about things which had been buried for many, many years; and, as he listened, there came back to Brian confused pictures of those old days—shuffled recollections and impressions; and one phase at least of his boyhood's story visioned itself before him in almost tangible form.

Often and often, when he had permitted himself to sit and think over all he had lost, there had come back to him the remembrance of a very lovely and gracious personality which had passed intimately for a time in his home life, and had claimed from him the fervid homage of a boy's heart. He had still many little souvenirs which had been Mrs. Spanrith's gifts to him. And then, suddenly, he had been bereft of this most womanly and enchanting influence. When he returned from school for his first holidays, Mrs. Spanrith had ceased to come to his home. His mother's present fretful chatter cast enlightenment on what had been a mystery to the boy of those days.

For what Brian the schoolboy had not been able to understand, Brian the man understood only too well. This other woman, wife of the man who later on betrayed his friend's trust so cruelly, must have been endowed with just that perception and that exquisite sympathy which was

so necessary, so vital, to a man such as his father had been. That his mother should have disliked this other could only have been inevitable. Thus was now explained why Helen Spanrith had drifted out of her place in his home-life.

"I never have known," he said in his abrupt way, "what became of her."

Lady Draycott shrugged her shoulders.

"She died. She followed him. I quite believe he didn't want her, for why should he have left her and bolted alone? But she would go, and she took her baby with her. It was a mad thing to do, because she was ill, but I suppose she thought she had a right to share all he had; and of course it was not pleasant to be turned out of her big house and have to go into horrid lodgings. As far as I was concerned, I was very glad when she went, because your father was quite prepared to do all sorts of stupid things. He always had exaggerated ideas about Helen Spanrith, although, if she had been half so clever as she was supposed to be, I don't see why she couldn't have earned her own living when the crash came! And you will never make me believe," said Lady Draycott a little excitedly, "that Helen did not know what was coming and what her husband was doing. If I had been given the home she had, and jewels and all sorts of things, I should naturally have wanted to know how my husband got the money. But she used to boast that she never knew what George did, that he told her nothing, and she just flung the money about anyhow."

Brian caught his breath with a kind of sigh.

"Why go back to all this, dearest?" he asked. "I repeat I think it a great pity Mrs. Lingfield should have chosen to speak to you about what, after all, is an intimate matter. Moreover, it has been buried so many years; no

good can be served by dragging it out of its grave now."

"I don't agree with you, Brian! As Mrs. Lingfield said, our case was not like hers. Your father didn't speculate or gamble. It is pretty well known that if Spanrith ruined many people he helped to make fortunes for others. But what he did to us was so shameful, to come to a working man like your father and ask him, for friendship's sake, to lend him all the money he could, knowing that he was just pouring it away! I call that a crime! It was just because your father was so simple that Spanrith robbed him as he did. If he had had his wits about him he would have wanted to know something definitely before giving every penny he possessed; and I must say, Brian," the little woman added, looking hot and excited, "I do think your father *should* have known better. He *should*' have thought of you and of me! Everybody knew what a spendthrift George Spanrith was and how enormously he gambled"

Brian frowned painfully. He moved towards the bed and took his mother's hand in his.

"Listen to me," he said. "Put all this on one side, mother. I am sure you must realize that you do no good by exciting yourself over this old business. What my father did was what you or I would have done, what any man would have done, to a friend whom he trusted. I never wanted that money, and your life has not been spoiled because it was lost. Let us forget it. As a great personal favour to myself I beg of you not to talk to Mrs. Lingfield or anyone else, and, above all, do not attempt to get in touch with any of the Spanrith family. It would be the height of absurdity to attempt to obtain a restitution of my father's money at this late day."

Lady Draycott took her hand away from his.

"It is all very well for you to talk like that, Brian. You don't care about money, and you don't want it, but it is a different matter for me. I daresay you think I am extravagant, and that we ought to do splendidly with what we have, and I am not pretending that my husband is poor; but you cannot possibly understand what life means to a woman in my position. Now that the girls are getting older there will be all sorts of expenses, and I hate having to ask Sir William for every penny I want. If you were in a different position, of course, it would be a different matter, but since you are content to be a kind of servant——"

Keston bit his lips quickly and then he took her hand once again and said:

"Well, good-bye for to-day. I shall see what I can do to make things pleasanter for you. I can at least give you this satisfaction, mother, and that is, that as soon as I have finished the work I am doing for Miss Heronworth, I intend to strike out in some new direction, and I hope it won't be necessary for you to reproach me in the future."

This turned Lady Draycott's thoughts entirely into another channel.

"William has great influence," she said, "and I know he is still interested in you, Brian; and then you are so clever, I don't see why you shouldn't do great things yet!"

Keston only smiled as he bent to kiss her, and then he went away.

It surprised him to realize as he left the house how angry, how hotly indignant, he felt with Mrs. Lingfield.

He could not in the least grasp her object in going to his mother in the first place and in discussing such an old intimate subject in the second.

He had a fairly accurate acquaintance now with Mrs. Lingfield's character and her general scheme of life. He was well aware that such a woman was a born gossip and possible scandal-monger. Nevertheless, he found it difficult to discover any reason why this old subject should have been raked up: there was an element about the whole matter which annoyed and even disquieted him. Though he had told his mother that it was his firm intention to leave his present work as soon as possible, Keston found himself counting the hours till he should be back at Crowder Chase, and this although he was quite resolved not only to cut himself adrift from sympathies which were becoming dangerously necessary to him, but because his mother's words had stirred in him remembrances of his father's plans and ambitions for his boy, and there came to Brian the feeling that perhaps he had not done the very best for himself hitherto. At any rate, he went so far as to delight his mother by having a business discussion with his stepfather, and for the first time showing a disposition to accept such influence and interest as Sir William Draycott had at his disposal. Yet despite this, when he found himself travelling back to his work, he drifted wholly away from all that which had been discussed between himself and Sir William, and yielded himself entirely to the delight which his return to Crowder Chase signified to him.

He did not see Drusilla on his arrival, but Bertha Heronworth was there to meet him. She told him that she was quite well, but Keston found her looking anything but well. She seemed to have grown smaller, and in her black gown she had a pathetic look. It had been an old joke with Drusilla to tease her sister about the way her gowns were fashioned.

"You only want a nice long gold chain," she used to

say, "and a cameo brooch, and then you would be just like a housekeeper."

The quaint little cuffs and turned down bands of linen which Beth generally wore with a house dress were absent now, and Brian Keston missed the relief.

She asked him some questions about his mother. There was an eager note in her voice, a tender interest which touched him unconsciously, for he felt pretty certain that there could not be too much sympathy between Bertha Heronworth and a woman like his mother.

"We have missed you very much, Mr. Keston," Miss Heronworth said when she gave him tea. "Drusilla undertook to dust the library but she only did it once; I did it the other days. We felt that you would rather the servants did not go in."

"How is your sister?" the young man asked after a little pause, and Beth smiled.

"Happy and well—so happy—thank God! There is such real sunshine in Drusilla's heart! She doesn't forget, she never will forget, but she is not made for sadness and shadow."

"She is really a child," said Brian Keston, "and it is the province of children to be happy."

They were silent a minute or two, and then Bertha Heronworth said:

"I only hope my aunt, who is coming to-morrow, will not upset Drusilla."

"You expect Mrs. Lingfield?" Keston said, with some surprise; then involuntarily he added: "I am sorry."

"So am I," said Bertha quickly, "but I can't prevent Aunt Edith coming. As a matter of fact, I suppose I ought to regard it as an honour in a way that she should wish to be with us just now."

"Perhaps," said Brian Keston, but he said it dubiously ; and then, yielding to impulse, he told Miss Heronworth of her aunt's visit to his mother.

"I could almost find it in my heart to wish that she had not gone," he said. "I suppose it was inevitable that she should speak of my father as they used to know one another very well, and perhaps with any other person this would not have mattered ; but my mother is so very easily upset."

Bertha Heronworth was looking at him nervously, eagerly.

"How did Aunt Edith upset your mother ?" she asked. And he told her exactly what had happened.

When he looked at her he was amazed to see that Bertha Heronworth had grown, if possible, paler. Her lips were pinched together and her eyes dilated as though she were suffering some sharp pain. For a moment Brian Keston stood looking at her, conscious of suffering himself because he could not possibly help her.

It dawned upon him in this moment of silence that he was drawing very closely to some secret significance of the change wrought of late in Drusilla's sister. He spoke to her abruptly.

"Why do you have her here ?" he asked.

And Bertha with an effort answered him evasively :

"She has a right to come."

If she had spoken out she would have said : "I let her come because I am afraid of what she may do if she does not come !"

And she was wholly ignorant that the man who was watching her instinctively gathered the burden of these thoughts. Even if he would have said anything, however, he had no chance, for at that moment Drusilla flashed into the room.

She had been for a long motor drive.

"Beth," she said as she untwisted the folds of gauze from her hat and throat, "I want you to do me a *big* favour. Please write and tell Jim that I disobeyed his orders, but that I am alive just the same; and do, like a lamb, give me a cup of tea, the wind has parched my throat. Oh! Mr. Keston, how do you do? How nice to see you again! It has been very mournful here without you, hasn't it, Beth? I haven't been able to go near the library: I knew I should weep."

"What orders have you disobeyed?" asked Miss Heronworth, as she poured out some tea.

Drusilla laughed and pulled a chair right up to the fire.

"Well, you must know," she said, "that when I drove Jim to the station yesterday I told him that Wilkins was going to give me lessons, and that I intended to be a first-rate driver by the time I saw him again; and he got horribly frightened and made me swear—well, not exactly swear—but made me promise that I wouldn't have these lessons." She took the tea which Keston handed to her and the hot cake, and ate and sipped for a moment; and then she said: "And I *quite* intended to keep my swear-promise, but when Wilkins came round for orders the car looked so fascinating I simply had to go, and, my dear, I have driven I don't know how many miles, and I haven't killed a thing."

"You will have to make your own confession," said Bertha.

"Then I shan't make it at all," Drusilla remarked.

She glanced up at Brian Keston.

He had drifted back into his customary awkwardness.

"Don't be shocked," she said. "By that I mean I'll choose my moment. There should be tact in everything,

more especially in the making of a confession. Don't you think so, Mr. Kestor ? ”

Apparently Mr. Keston had no views on the subject, for he went away almost directly.

“ I think he has swallowed a new poker since he has been in town,” said Drusilla ; then she looked across at her sister : “ Is your head still bad, darling ? I'll come across and kiss it and then it will be better.”

But as she rose to do this Bertha rose too.

“ Dearest,” she said, “ I have a favour to ask you in my turn, and a big favour, too ! I want you to do as Lady Torchester has asked you : pack your things and go and stay with her to-morrow.”

“ Why ? ” asked Drusilla. “ Do you want to get rid of me ? ”

She put out one cold little hand and Beth held it in both of hers.

“ I don't want you to be annoyed,” she answered. “ After all, there is no real reason why you should be here when Aunt Edith comes.”

“ On the contrary,” said Drusilla, “ there is every reason. I am not going to have you trampled on, and I have promised that I will be ever so good. I have made up my mind, Beth, that I will think the best of Aunt Edith, no matter how aggravating she is. I won't say or do anything to vex her, I'll just be an angel ! I don't want to go away from you, Beth. Besides, Flora knows she is not to expect me. Jim told me that he should see her last night and explain how impossible it was for me to stay with her just now.”

Miss Heronworth pressed her lips together for an instant, then she said :

“ Very well,” and made no further protest ; and at that moment Durning brought in a telegram for Drusilla.

"From Jim," she said with a laugh and a blush. "I think it is a lucky thing we haven't got a telephone. I believe I should be standing talking to him all day long. I must write to him, and, Beth, my sweetest, I *will* confess!"

CHAPTER XVI.

KESTON had been back at his work about two days when there came another summons from town. This time it was Sir William Draycott who wrote, and this fact in itself impressed the young man with the conviction that his mother had real need of him.

When it was made known that he had to go to London, Drusilla openly deplored his departure. She waylaid him in the hall.

"Oh! *must* you go?" she said. "Oh! you don't know what a comfort you have been to us! Do come back soon! Aunt Edith is behaving so sweetly. I suppose she knew we were preparing ourselves for something very disagreeable, and she thought she would disappoint us; but I am not really disappointed or deceived. Her sweetness means something else; and when this other thing comes, I want you near at hand to fall back upon."

Keston looked at her. Mad and hopeless as he knew it to be, even these words, lightly spoken and meaning nothing at all, had the power to move him.

"If I can really do anything," he said, "I—I won't go."

"Of course, I don't know that you can do anything," said Drusilla meditatively, "except perhaps you might stand in front of me if Aunt Edith wanted to throw a

plate at me." Then with a sudden remembrance : " But, of course, you must go. Lady Draycott would never forgive us if we stopped your going."

" I will come back to-morrow," said Keston.

" Yes, do," said Drusilla, " and then you can continue giving me lessons. I don't mean to let you shirk my education, because I shall have to try and be *so* clever when I am Lady Carlingford ! And do you know, Mr. Keston, I don't really care one bit about being clever ; I want only to be happy. I would like to live all my life in sunshine and flowers. I say this," she added, with half a sigh and half a laugh, " although all the time I am trying to brace myself up to be a strong, important, political person ! Are you going now ? Oh ! do let me drive you to the station in the motor ? "

She clapped her hands and ran to put on her warm things ; and she was in the highest spirits as a little while later she whisked the car down the drive into the road. But when she had said " Good-bye " to Keston, and left him at the station, she relinquished the car to the chauffeur and walked home instead.

It was odd how that instinctive sense that some anxiety was lurking in ambush against her had taken possession of Drusilla's mind. Although she tried to argue herself out of the suggestion that her aunt could be really inimical to her, the unpleasant feeling of doubt remained.

" And yet what *can* she do ? " mused the girl to herself. " It is true she has never cared very much about me, but she has never cared very much about anybody. I should have imagined she would have been more likely to want to be good friends with me now. What does she gain by quarrelling with me ? "

So Drusilla mused to herself, and yet she could not convince herself.

"Whenever I feel Aunt Edith looking at me, I turn a little cold. Well, I must put up with this just for a little while longer ; and, after all, I wouldn't care two pins if it weren't for Beth."

Just before she reached home she unfolded a little slip of paper which Keston had given to her when he had alighted from the car.

She had been jestingly asking him to leave her some home lessons to do whilst he was away, and he had taken out his pencil and scribbled these few words on a page of his note-book.

Drusilla had forgotten them, but in taking her handkerchief out of her muff this little piece of paper fluttered to the ground.

She smiled as she stopped and opened it.

Keston had written a quotation from one of Kingsley's poems :

" Be good, sweet maid, and let who will be clever :
Do noble things, not dream them, all day long."

She blushed as she read this, and she folded up the paper very closely and slipped it into the palm of her glove.

"That was very nice of him," she said. And she went the rest of the homeward way quite comforted.

She found her aunt alone in the drawing-room, where tea was prepared.

"You must be cold," said Mrs. Lingfield. "I don't know how you *can* go in a motor in this wind—in fact, I don't know how you care about motors at all ; I think they are horrid things."

"Oh ! Aunt Edith, you must let me make a convert of you. Come out with me to-morrow ? We'll go ever so slowly and you shall stop the moment you want to."

But Mrs. Lingfield shook her head.

"No, thank you, my dear, I value my life too much. Will you give me some tea? Bertha said we were not to wait for her; she is interviewing some person from the Rectory."

Drusilla had shed her heavy wraps in the hall. She still wore her hat and big white gauze veil, but even this disfiguring head-covering could not dim her beauty. Although she was really nervous, she exerted herself to be as pleasant as possible.

"This is where I have to be good," she said to herself, "and do a noble thing, not dream it."

And Mrs. Lingfield seemed extraordinarily amiable. Outwardly she had every semblance that is attached to a person whom one calls sympathetic. Her plumpness suggested maternal solicitude and comfort. She was very handsome in her heavy black gown, and the pretence of a widow's cap she wore set off her really comely looks.

"Now I do wonder why it is I can't like her?" asked Drusilla of herself. "She looks as if one ought to be able to take her in one's arms and cuddle her, but I should be awfully sorry to do it!"

After she had partaken of two or three cups of tea, Mrs. Lingfield settled back in her chair.

"Have you decided to have those sapphires reset?" she asked.

Drusilla coloured. She felt that this was drawing close to dangerous ground.

"I haven't thought about it yet. As a matter of fact, I have hardly looked at the treasures dear Uncle Edmund left for me. The only thing I took out of the box is this little brooch which I wear every day."

"You ought to wear the pearls," said Mrs. Lingfield. "They are very good ones, although I believe Edmund paid a fancy price for them; but then he was always im-

posed upon, always going ridiculous things ! Those jewels, my dear Drusilla, which he left you once belonged to a woman who would have died of starvation if it had not been for Edmund."

"They are dearer to me for that," said Drusilla, speaking on the impulse of the moment. "I know they are beautiful, but Uncle Edmund's charity has given them a new beauty."

"A charming sentiment," said Mrs. Lingfield, laughing slightly. "For my part, I don't care for second-hand jewels, and I should certainly never care to wear anything which had been obtained in the first instance by fraud."

Drusilla drew in her breath quickly. She had been straining her ears to catch the first sound of her sister's coming ; now she got up and said :

"I am sure Beth ought to have some tea."

As she moved towards the door Mrs. Lingfield said :

"Don't go away, I want to speak to you. I have here some other things which belong to you. I found them among Mr. Lingfield's papers."

"Something for me," said Drusilla, turning back, though not willingly. "I think I have had more than my share."

And to this Mrs. Lingfield assented.

"I think you have," she said.

The girl stood by the fire and felt her heart beating very quickly.

Her thoughts reverted to Brian Keston and to the little scribbled lesson he had left her.

"It is harder to do than he thinks," she said to herself.

Mrs. Lingfield had taken up a small box which had been lying on a little table close to her side.

"Some more of poor Edmund's purchases," she said. And she took out two or three miniatures and handed one

to the girl. "I want you to look at that very carefully," she said.

Drusilla took the small oval picture in her hand. The frame was set with diamonds.

The lamps had not been lit, but there was a good blaze from the fire, and turning towards this light, she could see the miniatures distinctly.

It was the portrait of a woman.

"How lovely!" she said. "How beautifully done, and what a sweet face!"

"Idealized," said Mrs. Lingfield. "Everybody looks lovely in a miniature. In real life that woman was not a bit beautiful; at least, I never thought so."

"Does this belong to the other miniatures which Uncle Edmund left to me?"

Mrs. Lingfield said "No" sharply. "This is modern work," she said; "the others are all valuable. Of course, this cost a great deal of money, but modern miniatures don't count for very much as works of art."

She took the second frame and handed it to Drusilla.

This was a miniature of a baby, and the moment Drusilla looked at it she exclaimed:

"Oh! *what* a duck! Isn't that little cap enchanting? Is this modern too, Aunt Edith?"

"That," said Mrs. Lingfield, in a deliberate sort of way, "is supposed to be a portrait of yourself."

"Of me?"

That nervous sensation rushed with a swirl about Drusilla's heart again.

"Is it possible?" she said, with a hurried little laugh, "that I was ever so angelic as this?"

"I daresay you were a very ordinary little child," said Mrs. Lingfield; "but, as I said just now, miniatures are of no significance as portraits."

"All the same, I like to think somebody imagined I could look like this," said Drusilla.

She had bent down to the firelight and now she stood erect again.

"Thank you very much, Aunt Edith, for giving me this."

"You can thank me by and by," said Mrs. Lingfield, and in the same breath she asked: "You see some resemblance in the other miniature?"

"Yes, I do," said Drusilla; "but I can't think who it is this miniature reminds me of."

"You have grown very like your mother lately; that miniature was taken of your mother when you were a baby."

"My mother!" said Drusilla; then she began to tremble. "My mother!" she said again, with a catch in her voice.

Mrs. Lingfield got up imposingly.

"I daresay, Drusilla," she said, "you have been wondering lately why I was so cold about your engagement—why I have seemed unkind perhaps."

Drusilla looked into the other woman's eyes; and what she read there whipped her courage to arms.

"You have been most unkind," she said; "but that was comprehensible; I suppose, because you have never cared for me."

Mrs. Lingfield paused an instant and then answered:

"Well since we are speaking frankly, I confess I have not been too fond of you; something always seemed to divide us. It was an instinct I expect, for I never knew the truth about you till those few days we were down here just when you were engaged."

Drusilla put down the miniatures on the tea-table.

"What is the truth about me?" she asked. And then

very quickly she added : " No ; I don't think I want you to tell me. If there is anything I ought to know Beth shall speak, even if it be something that is going to hurt me ; it won't be so bad if I hear it from Beth."

" Bertha ought to have spoken years ago," said Mrs. Lingfield shrilly. " It is just because she has failed in her duty that I——"

But Drusilla moved away from her. At that moment she heard the door open, and as she went across the room Bertha Heronworth passed into it.

Drusilla put her arms about Bertha's small figure and she pressed it close to her heart ; then with a break in her voice she said :

" Darling, I am so glad you have come. Aunt Edith, it seems, has something very important to tell me. She—she says there is something I have to know about myself, but I don't want to listen to her, Beth dearest . . . If there is anything, you will tell me, won't you ? "

Bertha Heronworth gave a little cry, recoiled for one instant, and then pressed closer to Drusilla.

" Oh ! " she said, " my dearest ! my dearest ! " .

Then Mrs. Lingfield spoke from the background.

" I have been waiting," she said in the same shrill, hard way, " waiting for you, Bertha, to do what was just and proper, and I have been horrified to realize that you had evidently no intention of letting Drusilla know who she is, and how little right she has to the name she has used and the place she has filled all these years."

Bertha had her face pressed close to Drusilla's.

" Leave us, darling," she said brokenly. " I entreat you, let me be alone with Aunt Edith."

But Drusilla shook her head.

" I can't go now. You know, don't you, sweetheart, I would do anything you ask me if it were possible, but I

have to hear all there is to hear and I want to hear it now."

Bertha kissed her in a long, fervent kiss and then released her. Then she moved with amazing dignity, despite her lame step up to where her aunt stood.

"By what right have you dared to deal with this?" she asked. "I won't ask you how you have become acquainted with the secret which dear Uncle Edmund and I have guarded all these years, for I am afraid this knowledge has come to you in no honest way; but let that be. No matter what you know, you have not the faintest right to enter into this matter."

"Possibly," said Mrs. Lingfield, getting very angry; "but then, you see, our ideas of what is right do not agree; that is the difference between us. You have always set yourself up to be such a monument of honour, and I have made no pretence to be better than my neighbours; and yet, my dear Bertha, I should be very much ashamed to have acted as you have acted."

"There is nothing to be ashamed of," said Bertha Heronworth quietly. "No wrong has been done to anyone——"

Mrs. Lingfield repeated this sentence in a shrill voice.

"No wrong done! What about the world, our family—me? What about Lord Carlingford? You call it no wrong to let a marriage of any sort, but more especially such a marriage as this, take place without informing the man who is going to marry Drusilla that she is not your sister, not my niece—that she only bears the name of Heronworth by courtesy and charity?"

Drusilla was standing just a yard or two away. She made no sound, but suddenly she put out her hand, and drawing a chair near, she sat down.

"You call that no wrong?" repeated Mrs. Lingfield.
 "Well, let me tell you that *I* call it infamous!"

Then Mrs. Lingfield, feeling her excitement evaporate, began to be a little uncomfortable.

Drusilla was looking at her and in the firelight the girl's face looked curiously changed and haggard.

For weeks the woman had been working up for this moment, but now, when she felt that she was in direct touch with something closely akin to tragedy, she was afraid of what she had done. Picking up her shawl she put it about her shoulders.

"You have brought this on yourself," she said. "If you had chosen to be straightforward, there wouldn't have been any bother at all, but I felt it my duty to speak out to Drusilla, to give *her* the chance, at least, of behaving honourably. You don't suppose," said Mrs. Lingfield, almost whimpering, "that I care about this sort of thing. It has—it has upset me very much, and I am not in a fit state to be upset. My poor husband's illness tried me terribly. I shall stay in my room this evening."

She got across to the door rather ungracefully. The silence of these two young women was not merely oppressive; it was alarming, and she did not like to look at Drusilla.

As the door closed behind her Bertha Heronworth covered her face with her hands, and then Drusilla got up.

"Now, please," she said, "tell me everything."

She spoke with extraordinary composure. There was firmness, but no hardness, in her tone.

For the space of a half a moment, perhaps, Bertha Heronworth remained with her face covered, and then she let her hands drop.

"Oh! this is so cruel," she said brokenly, "so cruel!"

Drusilla put out her hand and clasped one of Bertha's tenderly. As she released it she said :

"Nothing would have been cruel if it had come from you."

"Oh, don't, don't!" said the other woman in the same broken voice. "At least," she added, "try not to make this harder."

Drusilla caught her breath in a catching sort of way. There was a reflection of her usual manner in her voice as she said :

"Has Aunt Edith been telling me the truth, or has she only been indulging in one of her playful moods? It—it seems so funny; I am Drusilla Heronworth, am I not, Beth?"

"You are my sister, my child, my dearest," Bertha Heronworth answered. "No tie of blood could make you closer than you are."

Drusilla moved aside a little quickly.

"Still," she said, and her voice was now quite unsteady, "still, that means that there is something mysterious I have to know—that Aunt Edith has been telling the truth for once! Oh! Beth, why have I not been told all that I ought to have known?" Swiftly she changed her voice. "No; I don't want to say that; I don't want to say anything horrid or unkind. I just want to know where I stand, why this has happened, and if I am not your sister, who I really am?"

She bent forward to the tea-table and took up the miniature which Mrs. Lingfield had given her.

"Can you tell me whose portrait this is?"

Bertha Heronworth took the jewelled frame in her trembling hand. She looked at it long and silently.

"According to Aunt Edith, that miniature is supposed to be my mother; but if this was my mother, what about

the mother and father whose pictures are standing on my mantelpiece upstairs now? The mother and father I remember so distinctly."

Bertha Heronworth sat down in a chair and she stretched out her hand imploringly to Drusilla.

"Give me time," she said, "and—and—I will tell you everything."

Drusilla said :

"Very well, I'll go upstairs and take off these things, and then I'll come back to you."

She moved quickly to the door, and then she retraced her steps, and bending over Bertha, she kissed her on the brow.

"Remember," she said, "I want to know all—*all*. As I said just now to Aunt Edith, nothing will hurt quite so much if you tell it to me."

After that she turned and went away quickly out of the room.

In the hall beyond Durning, the butler, met her and gave her some letters and small packages.

Although the actual date of her marriage had not been made known publicly, many gifts were finding their way to Crowder Chase, especially from members of the Heronworth family, to all of whom Bertha had written.

Drusilla thanked the butler with her usual pretty smile, and, gathering her letters, went upstairs to her room.

She went slowly, with none of her usual lightness.

Nothing was clear with her; only the cold knowledge that something strange was happening, something even terrible, which lay like a tangible burden on her shoulders.

When she was inside her own room she stood and looked about her as one who sees things through a thick mist. She made her way to the little table by her bed, on which

stood her most cherished possessions, and took up Carlingford's portrait. She looked at it possessed with a kind of sudden anguish.

"Am I to lose you?" she said hoarsely; "am I—am I? Oh! my God! How shall I be able to bear this?"

The picture slipped from her fingers and fell to the ground. She let it lie for a moment, and then stooping, she picked it up and put it back into its accustomed place.

"I must try and be very quiet," she said, "and not make a fuss. My poor Beth!"

She changed her shoes and took off her motor hat and veil, and she even paused to run a comb through her pretty, wavy hair; then she went back to the drawing-room.

Bertha was walking to and fro, and stood still as Drusilla came in.

"Darling!" said Drusilla, putting her arms round that small figure. "Do try and not fret yourself. Just let us sit down, and you shall tell me all you think I ought to know; nothing more."

There was a wail in Bertha Heronworth's voice when she spoke.

"Aunt Edith knows how to strike!"

"Oh!" said Drusilla almost impatiently. "We must forget Aunt Edith. Perhaps she is not so much to blame. Perhaps she was chosen just by fate; anyhow, she doesn't count. Look here, Beth dear, whilst I have been upstairs I have been thinking. It was brutal to ask why you haven't told me this—this mystery about myself, because I know so well why you haven't done it: it is just because you have loved me so much; because all my life, ever since I can remember anything, your one thought has been to make me happy, to give me pleasure, to put beautiful things about me. You don't suppose I am going to forget that

now. Why, I *should* be a hateful creature if I did ! Come and sit down in your own old chair."

She led Bertha across to the fire and pulled the chair forward ; and she let her hand lie in Bertha's as she knelt on the hearth rug.

"You must begin," she said, with a painful little laugh, "as all wonderful stories begin : 'Once upon a time.'"

"There is romance in your story," said Bertha, in her low voice, "and pathos and beauty ; and whatever sorrow may come to you from what you must now know, I want you to realize that your mother was one of the sweetest of human beings. I have only a dim recollection of her myself, because I was quite a little child when she died ; but her memory has been cherished by those who knew her as one only cherishes things which are very precious. She was greatly beloved, Drusilla, and greatly mourned."

"Yes," said Drusilla, and her lips quivered and there were tears in her eyes. "And her name was——"

"Her name was Helen Spanrith. She was not only a dearly loved girl-friend of my mother's, but she was a connection also. My grandfather was her guardian ; and she and my mother were brought up like sisters."

Bertha was saying this very eagerly, but she was watching Drusilla's face, and her heart contracted as she saw that the girl was not listening.

"There was always the closest, the tenderest friendship between my mother and her cousin, and when trouble came in black and terrible fashion, it was granted to my parents the joy of showing their love and sympathy and protection to Helen Spanrith."

Drusilla had slipped her hand away from Bertha's and was standing by the fire now.

"Spanrith !" she said to herself. "Spanrith ! Surely

I have heard that name. It seems familiar." And suddenly a curious little cry fell from her lips. "Ah!" she said, "I remember! It was Mr. Keston who spoke it; from Mr. Keston I heard it. Don't you remember, Beth, that day we went up to London when you found me crying in my room——"

She broke off, and, turning, she looked at the other woman. Little by little her brain was piecing things together.

"Was George Spanrith my father?" she asked.

And Bertha Heronworth answered:

"Yes."

There was more pressing on her heart, more that she ached to say, but there are times when words are impossible and this was one. Drusilla turned round and stared into the fire.

"Go on," she said; "please tell me all the rest."

"The marriage was never one approved of, but your mother lost her heart, and being wilful, and of age, she had her own way. Uncle Edmund has frequently told me that it was the easiest thing in the world, to understand why your mother chose to make her life with Mr. Spanrith. Uncle Edmund was the only one of your mother's old friends who remained staunch to her throughout her married life. There was nothing to draw my father and George Spanrith together; in fact, everything to divide them, and so my mother and Mrs. Spanrith drifted a little apart for a time, at least. When they met it was abroad. ~~Chance~~ brought them together again. Your mother was travelling with you, a dear little baby of a few months old, trying to make her way to meet your father. She was lying ill in a little town in Switzerland, lacking money, lacking everything."

Bertha locked and unlocked her cold hands as she spoke.

"It was the story of her misery and distress told to my mother by the English doctor of the place which led to their meeting," she said. "It was there your mother died, Drusilla, and there that you passed into my parents' care. In those days my father and mother were travelling the Continent in an easy, dawdling fashion. They had no occasion to hurry homewards, and as you have often been told, they became so enamoured of Italy that they lived away from England till I was ten years old. At first I do not think they had intended to deceive any one in connection with you; but as time passed, and the little daughter who was born to them just shortly after they had adopted you did not live, it seemed so easy to put you into that little dead child's place. This will explain to you why Aunt Edith and other of the Heronworth people have never questioned, never known anything about you. Uncle Edmund alone knew, for remembering his tender affection for your mother, my parents thought it only right that he should be told what they had decided to do. Later on, at Uncle Edmund's suggestion, I was told also, and we were appointed your guardians."

Bertha Heronworth broke off and sighed nervously. She looked at Drusilla standing so quietly by the fire-side; she yearned to approach the girl, but Drusilla's composure held her aloof.

As she paused, Drusilla spoke:

"And my father?"

"Your father, I believe, understood that you died when your mother died; of this, however, I have no proof. But no one was in direct communication with him."

"No; I suppose not," said Drusilla; in the same breath she added: "Please, Beth, tell me exactly what he did? I know now that Mr. Keston held him to be so detestable that he grew weary of cursing the name of George

Spanrith, but—but I think I have the right to be more fully informed”

Bertha Heronworth sighed sharply.

“You are so young and have lived so entirely out of the world till this last year, that you may not understand how sometimes mere folly may be regarded as criminal. I have often heard Uncle Edmund declare that Mr. Spanrith was no worse than dozens of other men. He was terribly extravagant ; he liked to live well, to be popular, he loved to see his beautiful wife in a beautiful home, and he left no chance untouched to provide him with the money he needed. Whatever you may think or hear, Drusilla,” Bertha Heronworth said earnestly, “one fact is certain : your father adored your mother and she returned his devotion. If she had known of what was passing with him—if she had been able to influence him—some of the trouble might perhaps have been averted, for she never loved luxury, and would have been content with a modest life. But she never knew the truth ; she imagined that she had married an exceedingly wealthy man. When the crash came, however, she showed of what stuff she was made ! All that was possible to her your mother did, selling everything she possessed, even the jewels of her own mother, and those which had belonged to her as a girl, to meet the overwhelming disaster. . . . It was as a beggar—and a broken-hearted one—that my parents found her ; and yet, ill as she was and suffering in mind and body, she was struggling on to rejoin the man she loved ; the man ~~who at that time~~, had not a friend in the world.”

Drusilla turned. She looked at Bertha. There were tears in her eyes, and the sound of tears in her voice as she spoke :

“I said, didn't I, that nothing would hurt so much if you were to tell it to me ?” Then with a swift movement,

she covered her face with her hands and shuddered. "And yet," she said, with a break in her voice, "it is—it is so difficult, so strange. I can't realize it; I don't believe I ever shall realize it. You see," she said wearily, "it has changed everything."

Bertha got up very quickly from her chair.

"No," she said; "you are wrong; that is where you are wrong, Drusilla; nothing need be changed. You are what you are, what you have always been. We will take steps at once to make the legal use of our name firm."

Drusilla looked at the strained white face through a mist of tears.

"Beth, dear," she said, "don't you understand that it isn't a question of law, it is a question of the truth. You may give me everything you possess; you may bind me by every means in your power, but you can't alter the one great fact that I am *not* your sister—not a Heronworth, only an alien creature, who has been masquerading all these years in borrowed plumes! Oh! you don't know how it hurts me, Beth, to know that I have been a kind of living lie! Many and many a time—I know it now, though I didn't understand it very clearly when it happened—I have felt that people envied me; that lots of them were jealous of me. It is horrible even to imagine what all these people would think and say about me now!"

"Dearest, dearest," said Bertha Heronworth passionately. "Why do you torture yourself? No one shall ever know. Aunt Edith has done her worst, she has gratified all the spite that she has felt for you, but Aunt Edith can be made to hold her silence. Oh! dearest, you are going to leave yourself in my hands? You are going to be guided entirely by me in this? If I have done wrong in keeping the truth from you, you *must* give me a chance of really protecting you now."

Drusilla kissed her.

"As far as I can," she said, "I will leave myself in your hands, but"—she caught her breath—"I mustn't make you any promises, for I do not see my way clearly, and I might be forced to break them."

"At least, promise me one thing," said Bertha, clinging with her arms about Drusilla. "Promise me that you will not take any definite step in any direction without telling me. Oh! Drusilla, I have prayed for your happiness so much, I have watched it come, I have watched it grow. . . . If I see this happiness taken from you, I—I believe it will break my heart."

"Don't let us talk any more to-night," said Drusilla very gently.

She disengaged herself from Bertha's clinging hands, and she moved away, but Bertha followed her.

"Tell me," she said piteously, "only tell me that you don't hate me!"

And at this Drusilla turned:

"*Hate you!* Dear, sweet, precious Beth! Hate you! Why, I love you, if possible, more than ever I did!"

And they stood for a few instants in a close embrace; then as the door opened they separated.

"No; don't light the lamps yet," said Drusilla to the butler, "but bring some more hot cakes. Neither Miss Heronworth nor I have had our tea yet."

As the servant went out of the room the girl laughed, a brave pretence of her usual happy laugh, as she set light to the spirit lamp under the silver urn.

"And we must have our tea, you know," she said, "whatever happens."

CHAPTER XVII.

SOME friends in the neighbourhood dined at Crowder Chase that evening.

Mrs. Lingfield did not make an appearance. It was remarked that Miss Heronworth looked very tired and ill, but there was evidently nothing the matter with Drusilla. She laughed and chatted at the dining-table in her own sunny fashion, and after dinner she volunteered to sing.

The guests were people who had known her all her life, and who were dining to say "au revoir" and wish her good luck at the same time, for they were going on a tour of the world, and had practically invited themselves to Crowder Chase, where, owing to Mr. Lingfield's recent death, no entertainments were taking place.

Drusilla liked these people; to-night she found something specially sweet in their homely thought and affection for her. Although the conventional expression of regret for Mrs. Lingfield's indisposition was heard, no one really regretted her absence: and in her self-elected banishment Bertha Heronworth's aunt suffered much vexation. For a thoroughly good dinner could not dispossess her mind of the fact that she had not exactly triumphed; that, indeed, she had cut a contemptible figure in the eyes of the girl whom she had been so anxious to punish and abase.

She had been so eager to range Drusilla in her proper place. There was a long score of annoyances to be wiped

off, a long story of jealousy and resentment to be settled. But now that she had spoken ; now that she had struck her blow, Mrs. Lingfield was more than half way inclined to regret what she had done. She was just a little afraid of Drusilla, and the thought of Lord Carlingford made her nervous.

Just as she was retiring for the night Mrs. Lingfield's maid brought her two notes, one from Bertha and one in Drusilla's bold handwriting.

Bertha Heronworth wrote very briefly :

" I am very sorry to have to ask you to leave here to-morrow, but you have given me no alternative. I think it desirable that you and Drusilla should not meet again, at any rate just now.

" As I realize that you came here on purpose to make us wretched, you will, I am sure, not be surprised to know that I consider it better that you should not stay."

Whilst her anger was still at red-hot heat Mrs. Lingfield tore open Drusilla's letter :

The girl had written as follows :

" I understand that it is Bertha's intention to ask you to go away. In this I believe she is thinking solely of me, but I have told her that it will be necessary for me to have a little further conversation with you, so will you please let me know if I shall find you in town two days hence ? A word by your maid will suffice."

Mrs. Lingfield did not, however, send any reply to Drusilla's note. As a matter of fact she had not the least desire to have any further conversation with the girl. She allowed her maid to make known her intention to leave Crowder Chase very early the next day and there

was a certain amount of rejoicing in the establishment in consequence, for Mrs. Lingfield was one of those people who have not the art of ingratiating themselves with servants.

The next morning she was up and dressed at an unusually early hour, and she had left the house when both Drusilla and Bertha were apparently in their beds. As a matter of fact, Drusilla, who had scarcely closed her eyes all night, had risen at daybreak, and, putting on her outdoor clothes, had gone for a walk before the servants were awake.

It was a cold, raw morning, but Drusilla walked through the drizzling rain almost indifferent to the discomfort of the damp and cold. She had spent the hours of the night in beating home to herself the main facts connected with her present position. Unhesitatingly she looked ahead and saw her future. As far as it lay in any human being's power she was determined to fall in with everything that Bertha might ask save in one particular. Just at the very first, with that natural impetuosity which not only belonged to her youth but was so peculiarly characteristic of a nature and spirit like hers, she had planned to cut herself adrift from everything which had constituted her early life up to now; but the cruelty of such a proceeding outweighed every possibility of personal effort. "Besides," she had said to herself hardly, "I have always been told that it is a coward who runs away, and I won't be a coward. Whatever comes I won't be a coward!"

Lying in the familiar room, surrounded by countless evidences of the exquisite love which had been lavished on her ever since she could remember, Drusilla felt the tears rolling down her cheeks, not for herself or for the desolation of her heart, but for Bertha.

"I shall hate it," she said to herself between her teeth, "it will be like a knife going into my heart to live on here just as I have always lived, but I have got to do it. Bertha has given me a lifetime of love and thought, now it is my turn! It would be so easy to slip away, to make some sort of life for myself, but I mustn't do it! Bertha comes before everything."

She had kept her thoughts chained to this point. Beyond the one great duty which she would have to fulfil with as little loss of time as possible, she absolutely defied the clamour of remembrance; nor did hope for even one moment creep into her thoughts to shed illumination on what was so dark and grievous. Where another woman might perhaps have seen some light ahead, Drusilla saw none. She faced the future uncompromisingly.

Her marriage with Lord Carlingford could never take place. And in coming to this decision the girl was not actuated by what the man, or those belonging to him, might do or say: it was her own proud view of the position which governed with a determination that would admit of no argument. Yet proud and strong as she knew herself to be, she shuddered once or twice as she pictured to herself the difficulties with which she would have to contend.

Bertha had already shown her that she would struggle desperately against a rupture with Carlingford, and the man himself would be a thousand times more difficult to handle; indeed, in this the commencement of the fight Drusilla hardly knew what tactics she would use. Once there came upon her a rush of passionate bitterness almost approaching to resentment as she remembered how easily she might have been spared this misery. In this moment it seemed to her not only wrong but wholly incomprehensible that Bertha and Edmund Lingfield should not

have recognized the duty imposed upon them when Lord Carlingford, or, indeed, any other man, had proposed marriage. Naturally, she recognized the sweetness and the tenderness which lay at the back of this reticence, but in this the first bleak moment, when the whole world seemed changed to her, the value of this loving, protecting thought was atrophied, its significance was lost, its beauty hidden behind the ugly form of deception.

As she walked through the wet, dreary cold of the winter's morning she occupied herself entirely in trying to frame the best method of convincing Carlingford that in breaking her engagement she was not acting from petulance, or mischief, or coquetry. To tell him the truth was, of course, Drusilla's first instinct, but she realized instantly that this would not help her. Perhaps there might be one moment of hesitation, but there was so much to hold him. Drusilla could even hear him sweeping away all the arguments which she might bring forward ; and then again, apart from the mistake of sharing the truth with him, came the insistence of loyalty to Bertha. She had pledged her word that she would do nothing until she had fully discussed the situation with her sister. Not for a single instant, however, did Drusilla doubt Bertha in this respect. She knew full well that though she might struggle and plead, Bertha understood only too well that whatever else might remain unchanged the engagement with Carlingford must be broken. Though she wearied herself with restless walking in the cold, Drusilla was no nearer a solution of a most difficult problem when she reached the house again than when she had left it. She had at least one consolation, Lord Carlingford was not expected for another day or two ; in the next twelve hours, therefore, she must not only have shaped her scheme of action, but she must have taken the first plunge

towards the final separation between herself and the man she loved.

Miss Heronworth's maid was in the hall when Drusilla returned to the house.

Catherine looked surprised to see the girl.

"You haven't been to the station, miss?" she asked.

"Mrs. Lingfield settled on driving to the junction."

Drusilla looked at the maid.

"Has she gone away?" she asked in a low voice.

"Yes, Miss Drusilla."

"Did she leave a letter for me, a message?"

Catherine answered that she did not think so, but she would inquire.

"Seemed in a great hurry like to get away, miss, and it isn't much her way to be so early, she as is never out of her room till middle day. I expect your coat's damp, Miss Drusilla - won't you be taking it off, and will you sit there whilst I fetch you a cup of tea?"

"Yes; I'll sit here," said Drusilla.

But she did not sit down, she stood, and as she was alone she trembled, for her remembrance carried her back to the day when Carlingford, putting an end to his suspense, had wrapped his arms about her and claimed her.

"It wasn't right," Drusilla said to herself, "it wasn't just, or fair that everything should go so smoothly for me! I have been such a feeble, useless thing. Why? I have done nothing all my life but amuse myself! I ought to have known better, that if people want to be happy they have to work, to be of some use, to at least *earn* their right to happiness!"

She let Catherine take her coat and hat, and she sipped the tea when it came with nothing in her manner to mark the suffering she was enduring.

If Catherine did notice a certain subdued look on her young mistress's face she attributed it to the fact that Miss Drusilla must have been to early service. Catherine did not approve of this untimely wandering in the wet.

"You'll be ill, Miss Drusilla, that's pretty sure, and then there'll be a nice how-do-you-do with his lordship," she said tartly, as she waited on the girl.

Drusilla only smiled and poured herself out another cup of tea. She asked for the letters solely for the purpose of being alone. When Catherine brought her a little budget with her lover's well-known writing resting on the top Drusilla made no effort to open her correspondence. She just held that top letter for an instant to her heart, then as she sat down, she put it with the others on one side.

"How? . . . How? . . . " she was asking herself. How, indeed, was she to carry out the duty suddenly imposed upon her. The more she studied the matter the more difficult it became, and yet she longed to have it done.

As she sat staring into the fire with her aching, miserable eyes, Bertha came down the stairs.

"Oh! Drusilla, you gave me such a fright," she exclaimed. "I went into your room half an hour ago and I found you gone! I don't know what I did not think!"

Indeed, she was trembling, she looked almost exhausted, the mental strain of the last few weeks was showing its work with Bertha Heronworth now.

"Foolish, foolish Beth!" Drusilla said with a touch of her old manner. "Where did you think I should go to? Don't you know that even if I would go away from you I can't."

She kissed the hand she held tenderly as she spoke, and then she said half humbly:

"I am so sorry, dearest, that I should have frightened you, but I couldn't sleep. You know my old trick of rushing out of the house on the first provocation. I thought I could think things out all by myself in the garden." Then she gave a laugh, a little tired laugh. "Catherine imagined I had gone to the station to see Aunt Edith off. She was in a great hurry to get away, wasn't she?"

"I don't want to talk about her, I don't want to think about her," Bertha Heronworth said passionately.

"I wonder what she will do next," Drusilla said after a little pause; then her face changed. "Perhaps," she said, "perhaps she'll try and see Jim. Oh!—oh! that *would* be hard, Beth!"

Bertha Heronworth held the two small trembling hands.

"No," she answered. "Aunt Edith has done her worst. She is a coward. She is frightened even now, so frightened that she has run away!"

As she felt Drusilla shiver Bertha went on quickly:

"I wish you had not gone out. Will you come to my room, darling? You know you always used to like to come to my room when you were not very well. I remember when you were quite a little child it used to be a great joy with you to sleep on that big couch in mother's room."

"Yes," said Drusilla, "there are so many memories, so many sweet and tender things to hold us together."

The gentleness of her voice, the suggestion of submission in her manner, was almost too much for the other woman. In the long sleepless night which had just passed Bertha had tried to prepare herself for some impetuous, some passionate outburst from Drusilla. This mood of acquiescence was both pitiful and strange. They

went upstairs together, and Drusilla tucked herself up on the old, big, soft-cushioned couch and lay down just as she had lain when she had been a little child.

"Open your letters," she said, "don't bother about me. I believe I shall go to sleep, I am so tired."

So Bertha Herxworth sat down at her writing-table and started her customary morning's task of opening and reading all the letters which had been sent up to her. After a little while, however, Drusilla got up again.

"My boots are muddy," she said. "If Catherine sees them on this clean chintz she will make a tremendous fuss."

The truth being that she could rest nowhere, she was obliged to move about, and Bertha watched her with the greatest anxiety.

When Catherine and one of the maids brought up the breakfast tray Drusilla was rambling aimlessly round the large old-fashioned room.

"You'd ought to have got them boots off awhile ago, Miss Drusilla," was Catherine's remark. "Sit down and I'll take them off now. Fetch me Miss Drusilla's brown house-shoes," she ordered the other maid.

But Drusilla changed the order.

"Bring me my red shoes; I feel so cold," she said by way of explanation. "I want to look at something warm."

"The best thing for you," said Catherine promptly, "would be to get into bed—between the blankets, too. As if this was a morning to be out of the house before daybreak!"

"Catherine," said Drusilla, "you are a bully."

"I may be more than that," said Catherine imperturbably, "but I have got my wits about me."

"I wish somebody would take my wits for a little while," Drusilla answered to this.

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NOT EXCHANGEABLE AND
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To please Bertha she made a pretence of eating some breakfast, but the dainty dishes were left practically untouched by both of them.

"You see," said Drusilla breaking the silence, "the thing must be done quickly and it must be done surely—there must be no half measures—but the way to do this, Beth, there's the rub!"

"You will tell Jim the truth? I have been thinking it all out, Drusilla, and I feel, I have convinced myself, that when you have told Jim what you know it will make no difference."

"I am convinced of that, too," said Drusilla, "but that doesn't help me, that makes things very much harder because, don't you see, dearest, it is not merely a question of Jim or his feelings, there are deeper, more potent matters to be considered. Just review the position. Go over all the facts and tell me how you sum them up."

There was a touch of painful colour on Bertha Heronworth's very pale face.

"Drusilla," she said, "I see nothing to prevent your marriage."

"I was afraid you would say that," the girl answered in a low voice.

"But—" Bertha said in a strained voice; then she paused for a moment and sat with her hand over her brow, and then she began speaking: "This old story really doesn't affect you—you are the same as you were when Jim fell in love with you—how *could* it change you? Do you feel any different?"

"I daresay it is very ridiculous," said Drusilla, "but since last night, Beth, I do feel different: I feel as if I had lost something. I shall never be sure of myself in the future. All sorts of things are coming back to me now that I never understood at the time they happened.

I can remember when I was ever such a little thing how fond people were of remarking on the extraordinary difference between us. You were always so quiet, so methodical; you had such pretty, sedate ways, you were so wise; even as a little girl, Beth, you showed all these attributes which have been so marked in you as a woman, and I—I was just the opposite, a petulant, selfish, emotional little piece of goods. A butterfly! even in my cradle. Don't you remember how furious dear old Charlotte Waters always used to be with me? She never could pin me down to my lessons. Your mind was constantly absorbing something of interest, something of value, whilst I would be staring out at the sunshine and the flowers, longing to be free, always thinking of excitement. You can't deny this, Beth, nor can you deny the fact that it was your father's nature speaking in you just as it was my father's spirit which found expression in me!"

"I think you are wrong," said Bertha Heronworth very quietly. "You were always a happy child, and you became a happy girl, but as you have grown up your likeness to your mother has become more and more pronounced. Just as your face resembles hers, so in heart, in mind, you are her child. I have Uncle Edmund as my authority for this. He knew your mother so well, it was your likeness to her which endeared you to him. If you put such thoughts as these in your mind I don't like to look towards the future."

Drusilla sighed.

"I dare say I am seeing everything in a 'distorted fashion just now, but it is not so very unnatural, is it? knowing as I do know that there is tainted blood in my veins, not to doubt myself."

"I think that is an outrageous thing to say, a terrible, a shameful thought to harbour." Miss Heronworth

spoke coldly, even hardly; "and it is very feeble," she went on, "the excuse of a weak nature. We are what we choose to be. Even though circumstances should range themselves pitilessly against us, individual instinct can always hold its own. With you, everything has been done to encourage beauty of thought, sweetness of heart and mind. Perhaps I have been foolish in trying to keep you a child so long, but if you lack practical knowledge of life you have had so much else! You shock me terribly, Drusilla, when you speak of doubting yourself."

"I don't think we need trouble about me," said Drusilla wearily.

Bertha got up and stood a moment by the fireplace.

"You are resolved to break off your marriage?" "And as Drusilla just bent her head she asked: "Why? In this, remember," said Miss Heronworth, "you must think not entirely of yourself, of that humiliation to your pride which Aunt Edith dealt out to you yesterday; you feel as I do, that when Jim knows all I ought to have told him it will make no difference to him. What *does* signify is that Jim really cares for you, that you are really necessary to him. Do you think you have the right to embitter this man's existence simply because you don't happen to be my real sister?"

Drusilla got up and caught her breath very quickly.

"I don't know how you can ask me that, Beth! Quite apart from the fact that Jim laid such stress on my being a Heronworth, there lies the ugly truth that my father, whether from force of circumstances, or from sheer wickedness, was proved to be dishonourable, dishonest, a traitor, almost a criminal. The fact that Jim would care enough about me to marry me, knowing all this, is just one reason why I, who love him, will never consent to be his wife."

Bertha Heronworth laughed suddenly.

"So much for hereditary instinct! You defeat your own argument, Drusilla."

And Drusilla put her hands to her brow and cried out piteously, passionately:

"Oh! Don't let us talk any more, my head feels as if it would burst, and I—I am suffocating." Then she sat down and the tears came.

Bertha went across to her and put that hot, aching head against her breast.

"Let us go out," she said. "Take me in the motor, you shall drive me, you wanted to drive me two days ago—now I am ready to go. It is not bed and rest you want, it is movement. I know exactly how you feel."

It was so pitiful to see Drusilla's face swollen and tear-stained.

The girl rested on that loving heart for a little while and then she got up.

"Catherine will make an awful fuss," she said weakly, "but still I *should* like to go! But you'll wrap up, won't you, Beth? It will be awfully cold! And you are not frightened? Perhaps we had better let Wilkins drive."

"No," said Bertha, "I want you to drive. Wilkins can go with us, of course, because we may lose our way, but it will do you good to drive."

Catherine heard of her mistress's intention with uplifted eyebrows and waited on Miss Heronworth in grim silence. When she carried out the various rugs and wraps with a grudging aspect her irritation found vent in words.

"Nice sort of day this," she said to the chauffeur, "to go a-prancing about the country. I'll thank you, Mr. Wilkins, to see as Miss Drusilla doesn't put Miss Heronworth into no ditch."

"There are worse places than ditches," said Wilkins with knowledge.

Carefully shrouded in her motor veil, Drusilla's tear-stained face was hidden from view.

"Shall we make our way to the sea?" she asked, and as Bertha eagerly assented she laughed faintly. "You dear, dear soul," she said, "I wonder if you know how good you are? Now you'll tell me, Beth, won't you, if you feel we are going too quickly, or if you are cold, or anything of the sort?"

Bertha Heronworth answered bravely:

"Oh! I mean to thoroughly enjoy myself. It isn't a lovely day, but still we are together, and we can always be happy while we are together, Drusilla."

And Drusilla with quivering lips said:

"Yes, there will always be happiness while we are together."

CHAPTER XVIII.

DRUSILLA'S desire that he should not leave them, lightly spoken as it had been, had yet carried a suggestion of seriousness which disturbed Keston. He was, of course, fully conscious that in remaining he could have done very little, if anything, to prevent Mrs. Lingfield from being disagreeable. Nevertheless it would have been a delight to have felt that even in this shadowy way he could have rendered Drusilla some little service, and though, like herself, he could not really understand why the elder woman should be so antagonistic, he realized that she possessed means to sensibly fret and annoy the girl. He intended to get back as soon as possible, but when he reached town, Brian Keston found his mother not only extremely unwell, but in a highly nervous mood. His stepfather received him on his arrival, and Sir William Draycott frankly confessed that he was at a loss to know how to deal with his wife in her present condition.

"She is thoroughly upsetting herself about something which I cannot get from her, and I have sent for you, because I think it more than probable she may tell you what is on her mind. If it is money . . . well" said Sir William, with a gallant effort, "I must face the difficulty and deal with it to the best of my ability. Of course, you know, my dear Brian, your mother is a hopeless muddler where money is concerned. What she does

with it, God alone knows ! But she would drain a bank, and, unfortunately, my resources are limited."

Keston did not answer immediately; and then he said :

"She told me what was worrying her when I was here the other day. She has put it into her mind that there is a possibility of getting back some of the money my father lost through that man Spanrith. Of course, you heard all about it?"

"Yes, of course; but God bless my soul!" said Sir William, "why should Rosalie wake up now and think she is going to recover what was lost then? Why, it is an affair of years ago."

"Nearly twenty years ago!" said Brian.

"How on earth has this bee got in her bonnet?"

"Some chattering old woman," said Brian hardly.

"We must put a stop to it."

Lady Draycott, however, proved anything but easy to manage. She was hysterical, angry, reproachful.

"You never cared for me," she said to Brian. "You have never loved me. If you had loved me, you never would have treated me as you have done, all these years!"

To all the arguments produced she had one reply :

"I don't see why other people should have my money."

After a little while Brian lost his patience.

"My dear mother, be reasonable; we have yet to learn," he said, "that there *was* money when Spanrith died. If it is true that all he had was a little he borrowed from my father—I say little, because what was a fortune to us was really nothing to him—it will be very difficult to trace what became of anything he left. Certainly his own family never touched a penny—they repudiated him completely."

"I don't care whether they had a penny or not," Lady Draycott said. "We can't know what he had unless we try and find out."

And then Brian took a firm stand

"My dear mother," he said, "if you go into this matter in any way whatever, you will never see me again. I flatly refuse to sanction any such action on your part. Perhaps there is not money enough for you—well, you are not the only one who is not satisfied. Sir William does everything he can to meet your wishes, and it is your positive duty to work in with him. I am willing to help you as far as I possibly can, but I will not permit you to rake up this old business."

Lady Draycott wept long and loudly, but she could not move her son. And Brian did not leave her till he had exacted from her a solemn assurance that she would fall in with his wishes. Greatly against his inclination, he remained with her throughout the next day; when she pressed him to stay a second night, however, he refused.

"I must get back to my work. I can't leave Crowder Chase till I have finished what I am doing, and the more I delay, the longer I shall be about it naturally."

"It is very sad that you cannot be with me when I am so ill," said Lady Draycott dolefully.

But Brian, as he stooped over to kiss her, smiled.

"You are going to be well enough to go down to the South of France. Sir William is making arrangements to take you there as soon as possible."

Though he travelled by express, the return journey seemed long and tedious to Keston. There was nothing to meet him when he arrived, but this was his own fault, as he had given no notice by what train he would return. To walk through the woods and fields in the dusk was plea-

sant enough, however, and as he turned in through the familiar gates a sigh of actual content escaped his lips.

He made his way to the back of the house where his bag was taken from him, and then he went into the hall. Here he found Drusilla. She was wearing a cap and a coat, and at the first glance at her face Keston frowned. It was as though she had aged : the extraordinary radiance of her youth and beauty had gone utterly from her.

She heard his step, but thought it was the butler, and asked :

“ Are those two telegrams gone, Durning ? ”

Then as the young man came into the firelight, she gave a little gasp, and she stretched out her hand with such spontaneous and sincere welcome, that he took it in both of his and held it in a firm grip.

“ Oh ! Mr. Keston, I am so glad, so *glad* to see you ! ” Drusilla exclaimed ; then in the same breath : “ Beth is ill, and it is all my fault—yes, it is all my fault ! I took her out in the motor this morning. We drove miles and miles in the mist and cold, and when we stopped to get some lunch Beth could hardly move. They *didn't* want her to come home,” Drusilla went on, “ I mean the people in the hotel thought it wasn't fit for her to come away ; but she pleaded so much to be brought back here, that we wrapped her up, and I sat and held her in my arms all the way. Wilkins drove like steam, but she got worse, and now——”

“ Oh ! you mustn't distress yourself in this way,” said Keston. And now he patted her hand comfortingly. “ It is only a chill ! ”

“ No ; it is more than that,” said Drusilla. “ You know, Beth has been making herself ill all this time, and to-day she did the worst thing that she could possibly have done. It's so awful ! She is lying up there and she doesn't know

me. They carried her up. I thought she had fainted, but it is something much worse than a fainting fit." And once again Drusilla said: "Oh! I am so glad to see you. I felt nearly mad."

"Of course, Dr. Redgood is with her," Keston said.

"Oh! yes, of course. I had the sense to telegraph to him before we started to come back here, and he was waiting for us when we arrived. He is upstairs now. A nurse is coming in at once, and Dr. Redgood wants another opinion. I have just telegraphed to the specialist he has asked for."

"But Miss Heronworth is very strong," said Brian Keston eagerly. "She has often told me that, though she looks so delicate, she has great stamina."

"Yes, I know she says that, and perhaps it is true; but she has had an awful lot of business dragging and worrying her these last few weeks. You've seen, haven't you, that she was bothered? Why, I told you a long time ago, before Christmas, that I wasn't happy about her; so she has just been working up for an illness. And I, like the beastly selfish ass I am, never realized that she might break down suddenly!"

"I think you will break down too," said Keston quietly, "if you don't take care of yourself. I wonder if you have had any food; you look to me shockingly tired. You'll serve no good purpose by being ill, will you?"

"I don't care if I am ill," said Drusilla, with bitter recklessness. "I don't care if I die!"

And the man said:

"Hush! You are very wicked. You speak like a spoilt child, and you are a spoilt child; but you have to grow out of childhood, you know, and this is the beginning. Now is your moment to show that you have some

depth in you, that you are more than a pretty figurehead. If your sister is ill, then you must take her place; you must be strong and put personal feelings in the background."

Drusilla rubbed away the tears in her eyes and looked at him. He spoke quite sternly and with a kind of authority. She said nothing for a moment, and then she said:

"I'll try; but you don't know everything."

The doctor from the neighbouring village came downstairs at that moment.

"Ask Durning for lights," Drusilla said to Brian Keston.

She waited for the doctor to speak, but she had no need of words. She read his verdict in his face.

"It is impossible to say at this early stage what may develop," the medical man said. "I find your sister in an unusually prostrate condition. Her maid tells me that she has been sleeping very badly, that her appetite has been very poor."

"She has been fretting," Drusilla said, "about me. You see, she thought she was going to lose me."

"I shall come back in a couple of hours," Dr. Redgood said. "I may then find her better. You must take care of yourself, Miss Drusilla. I cannot have you falling ill too, you know, or what would Lord Carlingford say?"

When he had driven off, Keston came back.

By the light of the lamps he could see the pathetic whiteness of her face and the quivering of her lips.

"If you did a wise thing," he said, "you'd go to bed."

"I never did a wise thing, I'm not going to begin now," said Drusilla. And then said: "Bed! If you could only know how I dread the night! If you want to help me,

you won't put me away by myself—you'll talk to me. I'm just going up now to sit in her room for a little while, but I'll come down again."

Keston went to his own apartments. He felt the material comfort which surrounded him but vaguely. The news that Bertha Heronworth was ill gave him a pang. He had grown so fond of her and her gentle ways. Their interests were so similar, their enthusiasm so mutually sincere. It was enormously due to the influence she exercised upon him that Keston had progressed to so large an extent out of his almost churlish shyness and self-obliteration. She stood to him at this time in the light of a loved—a real friend.

On his way home he had practically resolved to speak once again to Bertha Heronworth about his mother. Strange as the circumstance might seem, he yet had convinced himself that Mrs. Lingfield's curious confidence to, and revived sympathy with, his mother was a matter which was of more than passing interest to Miss Heronworth. Just where this matter might touch Bertha intimately, of course, he was quite unable to guess; but of one point he had at least assured himself, and that was that he would have her sympathy in his determination to prevent his mother from stirring up a most unprofitable and unpleasant discussion. There would, however, be no possibility now of his broaching this subject, for in the few words which he had exchanged with the doctor, it was only too evident that Drusilla had not exaggerated the importance of her sister's illness.

He changed his clothes for evening ones, but he did not go back to the hall. He went instead to the library. The old calm, familiar atmosphere had the sweetness of a welcome in it. It touched him to see that the big room had not been dusted, and to realize that this forgetfulness

on Bertha's part had come through physical inability. It was so typical of the characters of the two women that Drusilla, who had undertaken to dust, should have tired immediately, and that Bertha should have done it so steadily and lovingly. He did not attempt to work, but he sat down in his accustomed place, and Bob stretched himself as usual in front of the fire. In a little while, however, the dog sat up and pricked his ears, and Keston got up too, as the door opened to admit Drusilla.

She had changed her frock, but she still had the same weary look.

"You are not going to stay here, are you?" she asked. "If so, may I stay with you? Catherine won't let me go back to Beth; the nurse is there, and they say she is going to sleep. I told Catherine if I came away, now I mean to be there in the night; but she is awfully angry with me. You see, she was so set against our going out this morning. Catherine simply adores Beth. I believe she is fond of me in a way, too, but there is only one person she really loves, and that person is Beth. And I understand just how she feels," Drusilla said in a quick, low voice; "such a lot of things have come to me in the last twenty-four hours—things that hurt. I told you, didn't I," she went on, "that I didn't put much faith in Aunt Edith's sweetness? Well, last night proved how right I was!"

She did not tell him any more, but as she sat down she got up again.

"After all," she said, "I don't think we'll stay here. "It is such a long way off, and the wind is making such a horribly mournful sound in the trees; and then if I am in the hall I can run up to Beth's room at a minute's notice."

Keston followed her into the hall.

"You said I ought to be brave and I am going to try, but I can't promise you I won't be nervous," the girl said. "I feel all on wires. I feel just as I should imagine people feel when they are adrift on the sea, and they don't quite know where they are going to, or what is going to happen."

"That seems to me rather a ridiculous idea," said Keston. "One of your great faults is, that you *will* exaggerate. You see, I am going back to the task of educating you."

"I tried to be good," said Drusilla, and her lips quivered. "I read what you wrote and I tried to do 'noble things,' but Aunt Edith spoilt them. Oh! You don't know how much she spoilt!"

Dr. Redgood came back just then and Drusilla went upstairs with him.

A telegram had arrived announcing that the physician desired would be down at Crowder Chase very early the next morning.

Keston waited for them to come down, and it seemed to him an interminable time before the doctor reappeared.

"I cannot tell you anything for certain," Dr. Redgood said, in answer to the young man's eager inquiries; "but I regret to say that everything points to pneumonia. What madness took Miss Heronworth out to-day, and in a motor?"

"Don't say that to her sister," Brian said very quickly. "She is torturing herself quite enough as it is."

Dr. Redgood continued to speak about Miss Heronworth.

"She has something on her mind. I cannot make out what it is. Just now she began to try and speak. Her maid seems to think that she wants her lawyer. His name is Lethbridge, I fancy, isn't it?"

"Yes," said Keston. "I know Mr. Lethbridge acts for her. Shall we send for him?"

"It would be as well—can you do that?"

"Of course, but perhaps we had better let Miss Drusilla write."

"Yes," said Dr. Redgood. "Occupy her, she'll do no good by fretting herself in this fashion. She talks of sitting up all night, but, of course, that is out of the question."

"If I may venture to say so," Keston observed, "I shouldn't make it out of the question. The more she does, the better it is for her; and if she only thinks she is a little bit of use, that is very helpful, you know. I went through something like this when my father was ill. That is a long time ago, but I have never forgotten it. The feeling that one has to suffer and do nothing is very terrible."

They were still talking when Drusilla came slowly down the stairs, and Dr. Redgood immediately asked her if she would communicate with her sister's lawyers.

"Do you think she ought to talk business?" the girl asked.

"I think," said Dr. Redgood, "that we must study her every wish. Your sister, remember, is not an average woman where business is concerned. Possibly there may be many matters weighing on her mind which an interview with her lawyer will relieve. Now do eat some dinner. If you are going to help to nurse Miss Heronworth, you must have all your strength."

When they were alone again, Brian Keston said:

"You ought to have somebody down here with you. Could not Miss Lingfield come?"

But Drusilla said "No" quite shortly. "I don't want any one, not even Connie," she said. "Thank God Aunt Edith went away this morning. I don't know how I should have lived if she had been here just now!" In the

same breath she said : " Beth is not sleeping ; she wants to talk. Dr Redgood won't let her, and the nurse seems to think she gets a little excited when I am in the room."

" Well, that is natural ; of course she doesn't want you to fret."

" What a nice, comforting person you are ! " said Drusilla ; " and you don't look a bit like it—not one tiny little bit ! "

They sat down to dinner very late and the door was left open, so that Drusilla could hear if any one called her.

Once when Keston was urging her to eat, waiting on her himself, and showing her the greatest consideration, Drusilla said suddenly :

" I want to ask you some questions. You needn't answer them if you don't want to."

He looked at her for an instant and then said :

" What sort of questions ? "

Drusilla flushed a hot, painful flush.

" It is about old days, about your father—and—and the man who treated him so badly. How old were you when your father lost his money ? "

" About twelve," Keston answered.

" And—and did he die immediately ? "

The young man shook his head.

" No ; I almost wish he had. It was the struggle, the fight for daily life, the awful trouble of those last four years which are so horrible to me to remember."

" Don't you think," Drusilla asked in a very low voice, " haven't you sometimes felt that that man who robbed you must have been dreadfully sorry ? "

Keston laughed.

" I am afraid I never gave him credit for so much good feeling. I was only a boy, it is true, but it has been my fate to see a great deal. I don't think Spanrith cared one

jot for anybody except himself. He was supposed to have cared for his wife, but when the end came, he had no hesitation in leaving her to do the best she could for herself."

Drusilla sipped a little water.

"And you knew his wife?"

"Yes," said Brian Keston; "I knew her. She was awfully good to me when I was a little fellow. I could have got very fond of her, only I went to school, and after that I never had a chance. She was a great friend of my father's. I wasn't able then, of course, to appreciate why it was that my father cared so much for Mrs. Spanrith, but I have learnt little things about her since from time to time, and more especially just lately, and I understand that she was just the kind of friend he needed so much in his life. It must have been a terrible grief to him when she died."

He paused, for Drusilla was looking at him, and the expression in her eyes puzzled and even pained him.

"I like to hear you speak like that," she said in a low voice. "I daresay you will think it awfully stupid of me, but you gave me a shock the other day—I mean that day when you spoke to me the first time about your father; and you said you had grown tired of cursing that other man."

Keston coloured.

"Yes, I ought not to have said such a thing to you," he said; "but, you see, the fact is, that in every man there is a bit of the brute, and certain things can bring that brute uppermost in me at very quick notice."

"I don't believe," said Drusilla, speaking very unsteadily, "that we have any of us the right to curse another person. You say that there is a bit of the brute in every man, and one thing is very sure, we are none of us, men

or women, capable of living our lives without doing wrong in some shape or form."

"Naturally," said Keston; "but there are degrees of wrong-doing. Premeditated harm is always, must always be, worse than that which comes spontaneously—the fruit of circumstances, as it were."

Drusilla was sitting with her elbow on the table and her hand supporting her head and shading her eyes. She remained silent for some little while after he had been speaking.

"When Beth gets better," she said suddenly, "I am going to change all my life." She lifted her head and her hand dropped with a start. "What is that?" she asked. "It sounds like some one arriving. Has Dr. Redgood come back?"

Keston got up and at the same moment they saw Durning, the butler, pass along the hall. The bell must have rung evidently, for they heard him open the entrance door, and after that the sound of two voices speaking in a subdued way. Then whilst they paused, Durning advanced to the dining-room door, followed by some one else. As the butler announced "Lord Carlingford" Drusilla turned sharply and Keston heard her say, "Oh!" in a pitiful voice. She was standing as Carlingford hurried into the room.

"Beth is ill," she stammered. "I—I told you so in my telegram."

Her voice, her manner, hurt Brian Keston in an extraordinary way; he passed quickly out of the room, exchanging a stiff bow with the other man as he went.

As Durning closed the door, Drusilla had one flashing sensation of agonizing fear. She felt as if she were trapped! All the day she had postponed the letter she should have written, and this because she had not known

what to say, how to take the first step towards that separation which was so irrevocable.

When the telegram had been sent to the specialist at Dr. Redgood's desire, Drusilla had sent a brief message to Carlingford, informing him of her sister's sudden illness. She hoped he would accept this as explanatory of her silence, and was absolutely unprepared for his coming in this way, absolutely unequal to meet the demands of the situation which had been brought thus precipitately to a crisis.

Lord Carlingford stood where he had pulled up short on entering. His face had flamed into colour. He could not speak because rage, a jealous rage, a veritable mad rage gripped him.

The very moment he had received Drusilla's telegram he had cancelled all his engagements and had rushed away to be with her. The absence of her morning letter had been a great disappointment, and he had been waiting for news from her all the day. Indeed, if he had been able to execute certain business he would have been down earlier. As it was, the information that Bertha was ill, the certainty that Drusilla would be unhappy, had urged him to go to her without any loss of time. He had had a tiresome journey waiting about in cold stations and travelling by slow trains. Assuredly he had not been prepared to find Drusilla as he had found her, or to be received so strangely! For there was no mistake about the girl's confusion at sight of him, nor in the hesitation of her manner.

"I never imagined that you would come," Drusilla said, not as yet conscious of the quick transition which had taken place in his feeling and expression. "It was good of you," she added, and Carlingford flashed an answer to this:

"Don't be a hypocrite ; you didn't want me to come. I don't believe Beth is ill, or if she is, you have a funny way of showing anxiety about her !"

Drusilla sat down suddenly and looked at him.

"What *do* you mean ?" she asked, and then she saw for the first time the almost ugly look in his eyes, and she drew back from him.

"I don't think it is very difficult for you to understand what I mean," said Carlingford not very distinctly.

Drusilla began to tremble. Just for an instant some passionate words of protest quivered on her lips, and then like lightning there came to her the revelation that in this anger of his—in this mistake which was at once so intolerable, so ridiculous, yet perhaps so natural—there lay the medium for which she had been vainly seeking throughout this long day.

"You are very absurd," she said haughtily. "You choose to come rushing down here without warning, and just because you—you see me speaking to another person, you imagine I don't care whether Beth is ill or well. This kind of thing is not merely intolerable, it is impertinent."

The man's anger did not leave him, but it passed into another form.

"It is not a question for argument," he said coldly ; "it is a question of simple fact. You know as well as I do, that you have no right, as my promised wife, to be sitting here alone at this hour with that fellow. Surely, if your sister is ill, as I am given to understand, your proper place is with her."

Drusilla shrugged her shoulders.

"I am no good in a sick room. Beth has a nurse and her own maid. If you choose to think ridiculous things, I suppose I can't help it."

She got up again and moved across to the fireplace, and though she spoke so coldly, so quietly, she was really shaking from head to foot. Against herself there was a break in her voice as she said: "Beth is ill, very ill, and I am horribly anxious about her."

Carlingford laughed shortly and snapped his fingers.

"So much for your feelings!" he said. "You care for no living creature except yourself."

Drusilla was nearly crying out, but she turned on him at this.

"I never tried to deceive you. Didn't I tell you in the very beginning that you were making a mistake? I never wanted you to come. I . . . I tried to send you away. I can't begin to change my nature just because you imagine silly things about me. I never supposed myself to be the kind of woman you want me to be. I am just ordinary flesh and blood, and you want a saint."

"What does all this mean?" asked Carlingford very, very quietly.

She shrugged her shoulders again and paused just for a moment; then she said unsteadily:

"Well, I don't want to say horrid things to you since you have come down here to be kind—but—I think you know what I mean. In any case, Beth's illness changes everything. I couldn't leave her now; she comes before all the world."

Carlingford moved to the fireplace.

"You are speaking in a temper," he said. "I suppose you have some right to be angry, for, upon my soul, I don't know what I did say just now or what I was going to do! It maddened me to see you sitting there just as if you two were——" He broke off. "If I've gone too far I am sorry; you hear me say it—I am sorry."

But Drusilla had drawn back from him.

"And I am sorry, too ; quarrels are so ugly," she said ; "but this must be the end."

"The end!" repeated the man hoarsely. "My God ! Do you think it so easy to end things ?"

"No," said Drusilla. "It is—it is jolly difficult, but it has got to be done all the same. Oh ! don't you see," she said, and now she was crying openly. "I'm *born*—to make these kind of mistakes ! I can't help myself ! We should be perfectly wretched together. Ever since that day in the Park when you told me what you expected of me I have been getting frightened—and now—now I feel I can't go on any longer ! And Beth wants me. Beth has been so good to me all my life—oh ! so good ! I must be good to her. She has really broken down now because she has been fretting about me, and though I am not worth it, I know it would have been an awful thing for her if I had gone away and left her. You must try and forgive me. I—I was going to write you all this to-morrow, but now that you are here you may just as well hear it."

She turned her face away from him. She could not bear to look at him. He had grown so white. For a long spell they stood in silence. Then Drusilla moved away from the fireplace and seated herself once again at the table. Her composure was amazing, and to the man perhaps the most horrible element in this moment of indescribable suffering. He looked at her steadily. She was sitting drawing imaginary pictures with a fork on the table-cloth.

"You—you are not in earnest ?" he questioned when he spoke.

And at his voice Drusilla turned quickly.

"Yes, I am," she answered. "You know I never did really want to be engaged ; marriage is such a serious, tiresome thing. I don't want responsibilities and worries,

I want to laugh and be happy, and I want to be free. Please let me be free. I'll be ever such a good friend to you if you will only let me live my life in my own way."

He came close to her and stood breathing hard for a moment. Then he took the fork from her hand and flung it with a clatter on the floor. With a violence of which he was hardly conscious, he closed his hands about her wrists and lifted her from the chair. When she faced him he looked into her eyes.

"You have told me again and again that you loved me. Only the last time we were together you said you did not know how you had ever lived without me . . . and now you talk of ending everything."

Drusilla gave a shrug of her shoulders.

"I daresay I have said all sorts of stupid things in my time. You can't expect me to remember every word I have spoken, and I—I am afraid I can't undertake to have any nice feelings for you if you hurt me as you are hurting me now."

He released her instantly, and with a nervous gesture brushed his brow. He watched her as she sat down and began chafing her reddened wrists.

"Are you speaking the truth?" he asked, after a silence which seemed eternal to the girl.

Again she shrugged her shoulders.

"I tell truth or lies just as they serve my purpose."

Carlingford looked at her almost in bewilderment; he was built on such straightforward lines. The complexity, the subtlety of Drusilla's present mood was outside his grasp, and she, sitting there, keeping back her tears with supremest difficulty, realized this. She asked him to leave her.

"Please don't think I am not grateful to you for

coming. . . . I . . . I want you to believe I am deeply grateful for everything. . . . I . . . wouldn't have made any change. . . . I would have tried to do my best, although I know our marriage would have been a ghastly failure ; but, you see, Beth's illness alters everything, and—and if you really care for me, you will do what I ask. I want you to go and I want you to realize I . . . I shan't change my mind. . . .”

He pressed his hand to his eyes a moment, then he stood and looked at her ; after a pause which seemed an eternity to the girl, he said :

“ All right.”

Crossing the room, he picked up the fork and replaced it on the table gently.

“ Of course, you know I didn't mean to hurt you ; it was a brutal thing to do. . . I am sorry. . . . Good-bye.”

He turned, and without pausing, opened the door and passed out.

Drusilla started to her feet ; he had left the door ajar, and just for an instant she nearly yielded to the yearning to follow him ; but the impulse was conquered, and going back to her chair, she sat down again, staring at the table in a dazed kind of way. Lord Carlingford had evidently kept the fly which had brought him from the station, for now from the distance she heard the sound of wheels going away from the house. She had said that he must be sent away, and he was gone—gone with the most miserable remembrance of her written in his heart ; gone with the ugliest, the cruellest impression left to wither his loving faith and pride in her. Before he had come, she had been so strong, and in the hours of the long, long day just drawing to an end she had almost gloried in the proud sacrifice which she had resolved upon carrying through ; but now that it was completed, now that she

had cut him out of her life irrevocably, there was no pride remaining, only a burning intolerable agony; only a yearning which choked her and brought a sensation of madness.

Durning, who had heard the sound of the closing outer door, hurried into the hall, and seeing no one, looked into the dining-room; then he uttered an exclamation, for Lord Carlingford had gone, and Miss Drusilla was sitting limply in a chair by the table, with her head hanging forward on her breast.

As he hurried towards her he picked up a table-napkin and a bottle of water, and at the same moment Brian Keston, who had also heard the sounds of a departure, came across the hall, and the butler called to him. Durning was busy pouring water on the table-napkin, and putting the damp cloth on Drusilla's brow as the young man responded to his call.

"If you'll ring that bell, sir, we'll ask for one of the maids," said Durning. "She's fair done, that's what it is; she's worked herself into a fever, about Miss Heronworth. All this is so new to Miss Drusilla; she's such a child, she didn't ought to have trouble yet awhile."

"I'll carry her upstairs," said Keston.

But as he was putting his arms about her, her eyes opened. The hair was lying damp on her forehead, some water was trickling down her cheeks to her white throat. She looked at him vaguely at first, and then consciousness came to her and she took herself out of his hold.

"Please don't bother," she said. "I am not ill, I am only tired, ever so tired; but I am going upstairs now. Good night."

She got on to her feet with an effort and paused before starting; then she gave him her hand, and she gave her hand to the servant also.

"Don't look so frightened, Durning," she said. "I am not dead yet, although you have done your best to drown me."

And so, with a laugh that was such a pathetic mockery of the old laughter, she went slowly out of the room, and the two men watched her anxiously as she mounted the stairs till she had passed out of their sight.

CHAPTER XIX.

BEFORE escorting his wife abroad, Sir William Draycott wrote to his stepson, asking him if he could come to London for an hour or so, as there were one or two matters which he would like to discuss with him.

"Send me a line to 'The Rag,' " he wrote. "I go there every day for lunch."

That he should receive no immediate reply to this communication did not trouble Sir William, who knew Brian's ways very well by this time, and about three days later the younger man telegraphed, stating that he would call at the club that morning.

By this time the news of Bertha Heronworth's death had been circulated in all the papers, together with biographical accounts of the Heronworth family and the great shipping industry, from which the dead woman had drawn her wealth.

About Miss Heronworth herself there was so very little to say, for her life had been passed in such a retired, uneventful fashion; but the majority of the papers made mention of her sister's engagement of marriage to Viscount Carlingford, eldest son of the Earl of Southborne, and several added the information that this sudden death would inevitably postpone the date of the marriage.

Lady Draycott made a point of reading all the obituary

notices. She dwelt with resentful bitterness on the amazing value of the Heronworth possessions.

"Doesn't it seem horribly unfair that some people should have so much and others so little? I don't wonder people get socialistic ideas when they read about a case like this! And then it was so wasted! Oh, I know she was very charitable and all that, but she was such a frumpy little creature, Will!—the sort of woman who would have been quite happy with five hundred a year. Brian raved about her, of course, but, then, Brian has such queer ideas! I wish to goodness she had left him some of her money; although," Lady Draycott added, with a shrug of her shoulders, "he would be quite capable of turning his back on a fortune which he had not earned himself." The next moment she said: "And now, I suppose, the other girl will come into everything; a lucky thing for Carlingford! I expect this is why he is marrying her."

Sir William Draycott, to whom these characteristic remarks were made, was gallant enough to declare that in his opinion Lord Carlingford had found his luck already.

"A prettier or a more charming girl I haven't met for many a day!" he asserted.

But, naturally, he did not expect to find his wife of his way of thinking, and, as a matter of fact, Lady Draycott found very many faults in Drusilla.

"I suppose she is rather good-looking," she allowed grudgingly; "but you have no idea what airs she gave herself that evening we met at Flora Torchester's! And from what her aunt, Mrs. Lingfield, was telling me, I am sure she is horribly vain and selfish. This poor thing who has just died was kind, though I found her intensely dull, if not actually stupid." Then Lady Draycott flashed to

another subject. "Isn't it *like* Brian to have told us nothing? Really, he is so odd—so secretive. And now I suppose he will be dismissed or something of that sort."

Very long ago Sir William had learnt wisdom where his wife was concerned; he never by any chance discussed Brian, not even when, as had been the case, the young man had pursued his way, neither asking for help nor advice, and profiting nothing by the very real interest which his stepfather had taken in him in the beginning.

Brian had already commenced to work for his living when his mother became Lady Draycott. He had remained at school a year and a half after his father's death, for Richard Keston had left express wishes to this effect, and sufficient money to pay for his boy's schooling, and after that young Keston had taken his future into his own hands. It was through the kindly offices of a London bookseller (a man with whom his father had had a long friendship) that he got his chance in that little out-of-the-way shop in the North. Lady Draycott had made tremendous protest to Brian's independent action at first, and Sir William had joined issue with his wife for a little while; but he had quickly realized that he had to deal with an unusual character, and half in pique, half in admiration, he had let Brian follow his own road. And then gradually, as a natural course of events, Sir William had ceased to think about Brian or to make any plans for him. They had, in fact, seen very little of one another until just recently, and then the firm stand which the young man had taken in connection with the matter which Mrs. Lingfield had so mischievously introduced, and which had so excited and upset Lady Draycott, had brought home to his stepfather very forcibly and agreeably the fact that Brian Keston was essentially a man to be relied on.

He had good reason, moreover, to be grateful to his step-

son, for without Brian's drastic treatment of his mother's hysterical intentions there would assuredly have been a vast amount of trouble ahead for her husband.

In asking the young man, therefore, to see him before he went abroad, Sir William was actuated by a feeling of the most sincere regard in a desire to be more closely associated in the future with his wife's son.

Sir William gave Brian a hearty greeting.

"You have left Crowder Chase, I suppose?" he queried. And Keston answered:

"I came to town two days ago."

"You had better come and put up with us; it would please your mother," Sir William suggested.

But Brian shook his head.

"I am sorry, sir, but I have a certain amount of writing to do. I would rather be in rooms."

And Sir William did not press the matter. He led the way to luncheon, and for awhile the two men talked on various matters, chiefly concerning Lady Draycott. It was somewhat of a relief to Sir William to be able to discuss his wife with one who understood her character so well as Brian did, and was, therefore, quick to take in all the difficulties of the situation.

They only just touched on the subject of that old business which had so excited and troubled her.

"I can't tell you how grateful I was to you for putting your foot down so firmly," Sir William said. "When Rosalie gets an idea into her head, all the arguments in the world won't move it; but in this case she could do nothing without you. I'll tell you what," Sir William said warmly, "I've given instructions that that tiresome woman should not be allowed to see your mother." And then Sir William asked: "Is there any chance of your going back to Crowder Chase, Brian?"

Keston shook his head.

"No, sir."

"A sad business, very," said Sir William. "She was young to die. What was it, heart trouble?"

"Pneumonia—the illness came at a time when the vitality was extraordinarily low, and it seems that there was no possibility of a resistance."

"Ah!" said Sir William. "I daresay if we could know the truth, there must have been influenza to start with. Beastly thing, influenza! does far more mischief than people imagine! Still, she should have made a fight—she was quite young, I hear?"

"Only twenty-eight," said Brian.

"Ah, well!" said Sir William; "money isn't everything! Poor soul! Her millions couldn't keep life in her."

Keston made no answer. He was still under the spell of that awful grief which encompassed Drusilla about. The change from the grey, chill silence of those days of suspense at Crowder Chase, to this scene of material and matter-of-fact life, produced a sensation of unreality. He felt dazed; now and then, indeed, he lost the thread of Sir William's remarks; the severance from the actual surroundings of Crowder Chase had not diminished in the least their hold on his imagination.

His stepfather was concerned because he had so little interest in his lunch.

"Not much sense in starving yourself, my boy," he said bluntly; "and this curry is uncommonly good."

Brian with an effort roused himself.

"I had a late breakfast," he said, and then he added quickly: "In your letter you said something about making a proposition to me."

Sir William nodded his head.

"Yes, you know Larnham? He's the Liberal member for the North division of Westshire. Well, he was asking me the other day if I knew of any young fellow whom I could recommend for secretarial and other work; and remembering our chat when you were up the other day, I said I did know some one. It would mean probably being a good deal in the country," said Sir William, "for Larnham has only recently bought a place up north, in Cumberland, I believe. He was telling me about it and about a library that is in it; and it was when I heard that the books wanted a lot of overhauling that you flashed into my mind. I told him that you had a berth at the present moment, but I wasn't sure how long you would be at Crowder Chase. Now I suppose, however, you will be free to take up anything else right away, won't you?"

"It is very good of you to have thought of me, sir," Brian said; and, indeed, he was genuinely grateful.

Sir William grunted.

"Well, it is a case of one for you and two for Larnham. He is an old chum, and I am glad to serve him. He wants some one a little bit out of the common, a man with his head on his shoulders. Larnham's great trouble is lack of memory. Why," said Sir William, with a laugh, "I have known him send telegrams to himself many a time, reminding him of appointments to be kept and work done. And when he forgot to do this there was the deuce to pay! That is where you would come in useful. The work would be all in your line. I think you would pull together. Will you go and see him?"

Keston agreed at once, and they talked over the possible engagement from various points of view. When they separated, his stepfather slapped the younger man encouragingly on the shoulder.

"I think I had better not tell your mother that I have seen you, or that you are in town, or she would insist on rooting you out. But look here, Brian, get a tonic or something to set you up; you are not looking the thing, you know, not at all the thing."

Keston's pale face warmed with a little colour for an instant.

"Miss Heronworth's death was a great shock," he answered.

He said nothing more than that, and almost immediately the two men separated.

Keston walked away from this interview, comforted in a slight degree by the hope that there might be work for him, and this although that eager energy, that desire for strenuous effort, which had been so characteristic of him from his boyhood, seemed dulled for the moment. It was natural that he should feel physically tired, for he had not been to bed for several nights; but his bodily weariness was as nothing compared to that prostration of spirit which possessed him.

When the illness had taken a grave turn, Keston's first instinct had been to withdraw from Crowder Chase; in fact, he had made preparations to go, but Connie Lingfield had so besought him to remain, and his own inclination to do this had been so strong, that he had given way; and yet there was nothing that he could do, no way in which he could help, except, indeed, to try to put some comfort, some consoling encouragement into Connie's heart.

Various relations had been summoned and Mr. Lethbridge had been at Crowder Chase from the very first; but there had been no possibility of discussing any business with Miss Heronworth, for after the first twelve hours she had drifted into a kind of unconsciousness from which she

never roused. Mrs. Lingfield was conspicuous by her absence, a fact which no one deplored.

Connie gave Keston constant news of Drusilla.

"She is so strong," the girl said, amazement colouring her tired voice for an instant, "and she sits there hour after hour ready to do anything at a moment's notice. She hasn't cried, she is so quiet; it doesn't seem as if she could be Drusilla!"

"I know she can be strong," Keston had answered.

But he could not discuss her, not even with Connie. He shut himself in the library; to work, however, was impossible. The knowledge that Bertha Heronworth's gentle spirit was passing slowly, but surely, away made those very tasks which had been so delightful seem useless and unprofitable.

Durning, the butler, grew into the habit of finding his way to the library more than once in those long, hopeless days.

Keston could not seal the man's lips, and from this source he learnt that Lord Carlingford was back in the neighbourhood staying somewhere near; that he came each day, twice and three times, and that all the members of his family had sent to make inquiries.

"But Miss Drusilla, she don't even know as his lordship comes—he wishes particular as she should not be fetched down or worried. I don't believe she'd come down, not even for his lordship. She won't move from that room," Durning said. "One would say she was in a dream, if it wasn't that she looks so awake. All the rest of them are getting tired, but Miss Drusilla never sleeps. This'll be mighty bad for her, I am afraid, sir," Durning said on one occasion. "You see they was so much to one another. It don't seem natural like that they should be separated."

When the end came Keston did not wait to see Connie

Lingfield ; he packed his small belongings and he went away. But he left a message with Durning.

"That address will find me," he said, "and tell Miss Lingfield, if she wants me, I will come ; that I shall be grateful to her if she will let me know if there is the smallest thing I can do."

Then he had made his way to the humble lodgings which had sheltered him on his former visit to London ; and for two long days there had been no word or sign. He hardly knew what he expected, but somehow he never doubted that Miss Lingfield would write ; indeed, as he left his step-father now, he walked back to his lodgings almost eagerly. Perhaps in his absence some communication might have come from Crowder Chase.

Sure enough there was a letter awaiting him, but it was not in Connie Lingfield's handwriting ; it came from Mr. Lethbridge, announcing that the funeral would take place three days hence, and that Miss Heronworth would be buried in a certain country churchyard in Northumberland, where her father and her grandfather and her great-grandfather had been buried before her.

"There will be a memorial service in London," Mr. Lethbridge wrote, and he gave the name of the church ; "perhaps this will be more convenient to you. If you should, however, decide to go north, we can travel together. Let me know."

Without hesitation Brian Keston went out to send a telegram, stating that he wished to attend the actual funeral. And then he went back to try and numb his recollection in the writing which of late had become a source of pleasure to him, and perhaps of scarcely defined ambition.

Now and again he took himself to task for this sense of devastating sorrow.

"After all," he said, "they were strangers to me; I wasn't even a friend."

But this argument had no power to prevail. Stranger as he called himself, and by measurement of time friendship might hardly have had space to grow, yet the whole of his manhood's life seemed to have been lived in these last few weeks. So closely was he knit to the remembrance of that life that he had hardly dared let himself vision a future in which there should be not one single thread left to keep him in touch with what was so dear to him.

It would have been difficult for the man to have said for whom he mourned the most, for that gentle, sympathetic womanly creature who had ceased to exist, or for the girl who stood alone.

Vaguely he found himself wondering whether the fact that she was enormously wealthy would have any significance to Drusilla. Would it taint the freshness, the unsophistication of her nature? Would it change her? Of course, it was not possible that she could pass through such an ordeal of grief and come out unscarred. Some of her old attributes she must lose; for instance, that resilience of spirit, that joyous anticipation of happiness (which in itself is a form of happiness), that laughter of life, which made even the passing of Drusilla through the ordinary routine of existence a matter of radiant moment to others—these things could never be wholly hers again! And yet it would be so strange to picture her grown subdued and reasonable, perhaps even conventional. He could not imagine her without a jest or a smile.

As he sat musing with his eyes closed, a letter was brought to him. It was the letter he had so eagerly expected. Miss Lingfield was in town; she wrote from her father's old house which had been closed since his death:

"I am here only for a few hours and am going back to-morrow," her letter said; "there were various things to bring me to town. I am writing to you now by Drusilla's wish. She desires me to ask you if you will come and see me. There is a certain matter which she considers that you ought to know and she prefers that I shall tell it you. Please name any hour which is most convenient to yourself in the morning. I want to go back by the quick train in the afternoon."

The letter had apparently been finished, and then, acting on an impulse, Miss Lingfield had evidently opened it again, and scribbled a postscript :

"Perhaps you could come this evening? I will not ask you to dine, because the house is all disorganized, but I think I should prefer to see you to-night. Please send back word if I may expect you."

CHAPTER XX.

ONE of the sitting-rooms had been hurriedly prepared for Miss Lingfield, and Keston found her engaged with a man who had been her father's secretary when he arrived.

They gripped hands in silence, and when they were alone Connie Lingfield sat for several moments before she could command her voice sufficiently to speak ; then she said :

" You went away so quickly and I wanted you."

Keston frowned and bit his lip.

" Had I even imagined that you needed me, I would not have gone. It was the sense of doing nothing—of being of no use—which drove me away."

Connie Lingfield sat with her elbows on the table and her face buried in her hands ; she was crying.

" Oh ! Mr. Keston," she said brokenly, " there is so much to tell—so much that hurts."

He looked at her from under his contracted brows and said :

" Is it necessary that it must be told ? "

And she answered him quickly :

" Yes. To you it must be told, so Drusilla commands. To others, I don't quite know as yet. That will be settled later."

Keston sat down.

" How is she ? " he asked.

"She amazes me ; there is something in her now which was never in poor Bertha, clever woman as she was ; but then, in all Bertha's life there never came such matter to be dealt with as that which lies in front of Drusilla !" Then Connie dried her eyes and pulled together her courage. "Mr. Keston," she said, "it is Drusilla's wish that you should be told something which she has only just learnt. She and Bertha were not sisters. When she was quite a little child she was adopted by Bertha's mother and father. She was given their name and was brought up as their own daughter. Her mother was a cousin of Mrs. Heronworth's. Drusilla's real name is Spanrith ; her father was George Spanrith."

She was looking at the young man steadily as she spoke, and she saw his face turn grey, and then she saw him cover his face with his hands.

"Drusilla said that you would understand why she wanted me to tell you all this ; and there is more," Connie added with agitation. "Bertha's death has precipitated an enormous difficulty. She died, having made no will, and Drusilla can inherit nothing. Of course, as Mr. Lethbridge has explained to me, dear Bertha was arranging to settle a large amount of money on Drusilla ; the papers necessary to this marriage settlement are lying at his office roughly drafted out now. She did not expect to die yet—she was so young ; and I suppose she never thought about her will, or perhaps," Connie added, "she thought about it so much that she hesitated to have it drawn up simply because she would have been compelled to disclose this secret which only my father knew. Whatever may have been the reason, the fact remains that she neglected to provide for Drusilla, who is left without a penny to call her own !"

Keston sat listening, but scarcely hearing. It seemed

to him that the tumult of enervating emotions which had been let loose in his heart was little less than torture ; more than this, there came to him a horrible suggestion that he had been the conscious instrument of a destined overthrow of the joyous and yet serene significance of Drusilla's life. It was as though he had seen her youth slain, her happiness poisoned ! There was a cruelty in this knowledge which struck him to the heart.

He sat so long without speaking that Connie Lingfield looked at him in a half-frightened way.

" I hope—I hope I have not done wrong, Mr. Keston," she faltered, and her voice made him start ; " but Drusilla insisted that I should tell you This is the only wish she has expressed."

" It is horrible ! " he said hoarsely. " I don't know whether you are right or wrong in telling me this. I suppose you are right, and yet——"

Connie flung out her hands with a gesture of despair.

" Why should Bertha have died ? " she asked brokenly. " She was so young to die."

Keston got up and moved into the shadows of the room. When he came back his voice was calm, his manner quiet.

" What are her plans ? " he asked.

" I don't know. She will leave Crowder Chase, of course. My stepmother has written to say that she wishes Drusilla to remain as long as she cares to do so ; but Drusilla will never go back there after the funeral."

Keston looked at her very quickly.

" Does—does Mrs. Lingfield know everything ? "

Connie just bent her head.

" Yes. It seems she knew the truth a little while ago ; in any case, under the present condition of affairs, she would have had to be told, since as next-of-kin she inherits all that Bertha has left."

"But you will take care of her," the words broke involuntarily from Brian Keston's lips, and Connie flushed as she answered him :

"Yes ! I only pray that Drusilla will consent to share with me what I have—that we may be together. I believe it would hurt her less to be cared for by me than by the others. But I dare not hope for too much. She has promised me, however, that she will come here with me for a little while. That is one of the reasons why I came up, because I had started negotiations for getting rid of the house ; now, of course, I shall change my plans."

There was another pause, and then Keston said :

"And the marriage ? "

"Drusilla has broken her engagement," Miss Lingfield answered.

"And he has accepted this ? "

"I am afraid he has been given no choice."

"No man need be dismissed," Keston answered just a little contemptuously.

Miss Lingfield did not reply immediately ; then she said slowly :

"I don't think we have the right to judge Lord Carlingford. I have seen him several times lately ; from what he has told me, I am afraid that Drusilla has not given him these facts which I have just given you."

Keston frowned.

In a flash he had grasped the situation.

"Well, we can leave him for the moment," he said.

He walked to and fro a little while, and then he paused :

"You will realize," he said to Connie, "that what you have told me permits me to move actively in anything which concerns her. I believe that in a certain sense I have a little influence with you—your cousin. Tell me in which way you wish me to use that influence, and I will

bring it to bear upon her. But we must go gently—very gently.”

Miss Lingfield thanked him gratefully.

“As I told you just now,” she said, “I don’t know what her plans are, but I am prepared for a very determined attempt at independence, and it is here that you may be able to help me. I will let you know as soon as we are settled in here. I shall be then better informed.”

Connie rose and stretched out her hands.

“Please say that you forgive me,” she said. “I can’t pretend to myself that I did not hurt you, but I hope you know that I would not have done this of my own free will, nor,” she added, “would Drusilla have desired it.”

Keston held her hand and pressed it almost affectionately.

“You must tell her,” he said, and he did not speak very steadily, “that I am grateful to her for her thought. At first I only felt the cruelty, because remembrance brought back so much that I wanted to forget. Now I see that it would have been a thousand times worse for me to have been told this story about her in some other way. Above all,” he added, “let her feel if you possibly can, that I am waiting to be of help to her in any way she chooses to use me.”

Keston walked slowly homeward, finding his road almost mechanically, so acute was the stress of his emotional thought. He had been, in truth, horribly shocked. It was natural to one of his temperament to feel a sense of something approaching to contempt for the deception which had been practised; indeed, it seemed hard to associate such a deception with a woman like Bertha Heronworth; but, in truth, he was not thinking of Bertha, nor of his father, nor of the strange sequence of events which had brought him so closely and in such a tragic fashion into Drusilla’s life; he was thinking only of

her. He had such a host of memories to draw upon, but his mind went back in determined fashion to that grey, cold morning when they had walked away from the cottage hospital together, that morning which had been the first real moment of acquaintanceship, the beginning of that comprehension of the girl's nature which was destined to grow into the most intimate and precious study. He winced as he remembered that petulant speech of hers.

"You must not think," she had said to him, "that I want to come into contact with things that hurt—I don't. I really hate suffering. I am afraid I hate sorrow. I could not live in shadow; but I have a certain curious sense of duty, I feel I must do certain things just because I hate doing them."

To what lengths would that curious sense of duty carry her now? How would she bear to live in the shadow which had fallen across her life? He bit his lip when he recalled the fact that she had already demonstrated of what stuff she was made. She had broken the engagement with Carlingford. That there had been a quarrel had been only too evident to him that first night of Bertha's illness; but that she would have had the strength to put the man she loved out of her life and put him out without permitting him to know for what reason she had done this, argued that she would not be facile to handle.

In a dim sort of way Brian Keston could hazard a guess at the resolution which formed the background to the chaos of thought produced by sorrow. The mere conviction that she stood alone, that there was no one who had the right to dictate, was in itself an incentive to the development of impulse.

He had spoken with a certain amount of confidence when he had said just a little while before that he felt that he possessed a certain influence over her; but this

confidence waned slowly. It gave him no sense of satisfaction to realize that her first thought had been to tell him the truth, for he saw in this merely the confirmation of her resolve to do that which was hateful simply because it was a duty.

Little by little, as he walked, and passed thought after thought before the critical eyes of his mind, he began to understand why Bertha Heronworth had stood like a sentinel and guarded the real story of Drusilla's birth ; and as his heart went out with a rush of sympathy to the dead woman, there came to him almost mysteriously the enlightening understanding of that restlessness, that agonizing desire for strength, which had beset Bertha in the first hours of her illness.

He dared to feel that if it had been possible to her she would have turned to him ; she would have asked his help, his guidance. Was it still impossible to give her that help ?

Just for an instant the young man's heart beat so wildly that he found it difficult to breathe.

The belief born so swiftly remained to grow.

It had been vouchsafed to him to see and to grasp in all its fulness the love which Bertha had lavished on Drusilla. It seemed to him (and he said this to himself without the smallest suggestion of vanity) that Bertha had learnt to rely on him ; that she had striven to win his sympathies ; that she had shared with him feelings that she had shared with no one else. The pathos of her death was enhanced a hundredfold now. How many times Mr. Lethbridge had said to him in those weary days of waiting that he would give everything he possessed in the world to have been able to help Miss Heronworth to just one hour of strength and consciousness.

The lawyer's meaning was clear enough now ; he, too,

must have felt, though in less dominant fashion, the struggle of the failing mind to set things right, to safeguard the future.

There was bitter irony in the realization that Bertha Heronworth's years of tender guardianship should have led the girl she had cherished as her sister to such a painful position.

Into those strange causes which had prevented a mind at once so practical and shrewd from at least protecting Drusilla in a material sense, it was, of course, impossible to enter. Keston did not seek for causes; he only clung to his loyal sympathy. Bertha was dead, yet Bertha's intentions, her hopes, her dreams did not die with her. Young as she had been, she had gladly abnegated her youth to play the mother to Drusilla. Was there no one left amongst those who had known her, and who had marvelled at the manner of her love, to carry on her task? It could never be the same devotion, yet might there not be a chance for some one to walk as far as possible in her steps, to stand, at least, between Drusilla and the real hard significance of life? Was this a task too delicate for his hands?

CHAPTER XXI.

Not a little to her surprise, and a good deal to her annoyance, Mrs. Lingfield found herself at this time in the uncomfortable position of being one all alone. She had, not unnaturally perhaps, supposed that at least certain members of her family would have expressed sympathy for her views concerning Drusilla, but nothing of the sort happened; on the contrary, the sympathy all flowed in the direction of the girl whom Bertha's untimely death had left unprotected.

The story of the past, denounced so hotly and with such righteous indignation by Mrs. Lingfield, sounded altogether different when handled reverently, and with fullest comprehension of the reasons which had prompted the growth of secrecy. Moreover, there was another phase of the matter which Mrs. Lingfield had overlooked, and that was that most of those who had gathered together to pay the last respects to Bertha Heronworth retained vivid and affectionate remembrance of Helen Spanrith, and the fact that Drusilla's mother and George Heronworth's wife had been closely connected deposed the suggestion of unwarrantable deception, and gave an air of naturalness to Drusilla's adoption.

Chagrined and uncomfortable, Mrs. Lingfield retired from any active participation in the affairs of the moment after

the first and most significant interview between herself and her relations and kinsfolk had taken place ; she pleaded illness, which conveniently excused her from attending the funeral or the memorial service. Not that her indisposition was wholly untrue. The disagreeable reflection that she had been instrumental in precipitating a crisis which had terminated tragically fretted Mrs. Lingfield a good deal. There were moments when she would most willingly have foregone the rather poor satisfaction her truth-telling to Drusilla had signified. She had wanted to rebuke Bertha and slap the other girl—slap her very sharply ; but, of course, she had never imagined that her interference would have resulted so unhappily.

Accustomed for many years to make large demands on the good-natured sufferance of her husband, and to be able to pour out all her grievances to her stepdaughter, her isolation at this time was most distressing to her. To have to realize that she was blamed, instead of being commended, for her upright abhorrence of a deception was hurtful to her vanity. Though she retired from Crowder Chase, she was kept fully informed by Mr. Lethbridge of all that was passing.

Immediately after the funeral there had been a serious consultation among the members of the Heronworth family with regard to Drusilla's future.

The girl herself was not present, but Mr. Lethbridge was deputed to represent her, and was careful to impress on those who heard him the fact that Drusilla desired to be independent ; desired, further, to revert to her father's name. At the same time, the lawyer was commanded to say that Drusilla considered it a sacred and loving duty to the one just dead to act as far as she possibly could in accordance with the wishes of those who now were eager to fill Bertha's place in her life.

The outcome of this meeting was an emphatic resolution on the part of those gathered together that Drusilla should be entreated to continue to use the name she had borne all her life ; further, that sufficient money should be immediately put together to provide her with what was considered a proper income for one who had been reared as she had been reared.

These facts were duly laid before Drusilla by Mr. Lethbridge.

The girl consented at once to continue to call herself Heronworth. With regard to the money, she begged to be allowed to have a little time.

"I want to think things over," she said to the lawyer, "and I am not quite penniless. I have a little money in the bank, and the jewels and other things which Uncle Edmund left me. You will please let them all know, won't you, how grateful I am to them ? Not for what they wish to do for me only, but for their loving and beautiful appreciation of Beth."

Though secrecy was not enforced, there was a general feeling of eagerness on the part of all concerned to keep the truth about Drusilla as a family affair, and to this decree Drusilla gave also unquestioning obedience.

"There is only one outside person who must be told," she had said to Mr. Lethbridge ; but she had not specified that person, and as a natural result the lawyer had imagined it to be Lord Carlingford, whereas, of course, Drusilla had had Keston in her thoughts.

She received more than one invitation from these kindly people who were proving their loyalty to Bertha's memory ; but she refused them all—at least for the moment.

She had given her promise to Connie Lingfield that

they should be together for a time, and this promise she intended to keep.

"I want to go to London for various reasons," she told Mr. Lethbridge. "Perhaps by and by I will go north and stay with Bertha's dear old godmother, Miriam Heronworth, and her sister; but now I don't want to go so far away."

And so in due time it came to Mrs. Lingfield's ears that Connie had re-opened the house in London and that Drusilla was there with her. She ceased all at once to be sick and sorry and became instead very angry. While the rage was hot within her, she sent for Connie. The cause of her grievance was great! When she had retreated from Crowder Chase she had requested permission from her stepdaughter to stay for a time in the London house over which she had reigned for so long as mistress. And Miss Lingfield had actually refused this!

"My plans are very uncertain," she had said. "I may sell the house, or I may not. I don't know what I shall do, but I think you will be far more comfortable in an hotel."

Another time this would have been the cue for an excellent and lengthy argument, but Mrs. Lingfield had been in a hurry, and so she had taken herself and her maid to an hotel.

And now she heard that the house was open, all the former servants back at work, and Drusilla installed in her place!

If Connie Lingfield could have avoided an interview with her stepmother at this particular moment she would have done so gladly, but Mrs. Lingfield's note was peremptory, and as she would be quite capable of swooping down on them, if her wishes were not obeyed, Connie sacrificed her feelings and went. She braced herself up to bear any

amount of nasty little blows, and found her stepmother in good fighting trim.

For quite half an hour Mrs. Lingfield descanted on her own unhappiness—on the shocking way in which she was being neglected. She dwelt forcibly on Connie's lack of respect in having refused her hospitality, and made frequent reference to her husband in a way which would, she knew, find its way very surely to the girl's sore heart. Then she came to other matters.

"I hear," she said, "that Drusilla is turning herself into a martyr, and that she has refused to take the money which has been subscribed for her! I suppose it is because she thinks *I* am contributing to it! As a matter of fact, I have not been asked for a penny, although under the circumstances there is not a shadow of doubt that I am the proper person to make provision for her."

"I have not discussed the matter with her," said Connie, finding some response necessary, "so I don't know why she has refused to take this allowance. But I think I understand what is in her mind—she intends to try and earn some money for herself."

Mrs. Lingfield laughed outright at this.

"Stuff and nonsense!" she declared. "Earn her own living—how? Why, my dear Connie, there is not a more useless creature in the whole kingdom than Drusilla. I don't believe she knows how to put her own clothes on—I am quite sure she couldn't darn a stocking or sew on a button to save her life. Poor Bertha was so ridiculous about her!" Then Mrs. Lingfield turned her attack once again on her stepdaughter. "And if you really care for her, Connie," she said, "you ought to put these absurd ideas out of her head and try to bring her to a sense of her real duty! I was given to understand that she had promised to prevent this scandal from being

known ; but if she must needs rush out into the world in this ridiculous fashion she must naturally draw attention to the fact that something very strange has happened."

"I quite believe," said Connie Lingfield coldly, "that whatever Drusilla may do, she will never—never succeed in pleasing you."

And Mrs. Lingfield reproved her stepdaughter sharply.

"You have no right to speak like that," she said. "Of course, you have taken Drusilla's side, and that means that you are against me. I suppose, my dear child, you have never stopped to realize the wrong that was being done to me? If Bertha had lived long enough to make a will, or if nothing had happened, and the marriage with Carlingford had gone through, she would have either left or settled a very large sum of money upon Drusilla, and in so doing, she would have acted most dishonestly towards me, her father's sister, and the rightful person to inherit her property! That is a view of the position which I assume you have not realized?"

Constance Lingfield got up.

"Please don't say such things about poor Bertha," she pleaded.

But the other woman only laughed.

"The fact that Bertha is dead does not exonerate her in my opinion, for she, and she alone, is to be blamed for everything! I am sure I have heard your dear father extol her by the hour together—he considered Bertha the cleverest woman he had ever met, yet just see what a hopeless muddle she made of things! I can't imagine," said Mrs. Lingfield, "how she could ever have supposed that Carlingford would marry Drusilla when he was told the truth. You see, it hasn't taken him long to break the engagement."

This was too much for Connie. She pulled down her thick veil and buttoned her gloves with trembling fingers.

"I am sure you needn't run away so soon," said Mrs. Lingfield fretfully. "I am so lonely in this hotel, and yet I can't go abroad: there is so much to arrange. I want you to give me Mr. Keston's address, Connie; I am going to ask him to advise me how to set about selling the books. Bertha paid an infamous price for that Caroby Library, a sheer waste of money; I don't suppose they will realize half she spent."

"Bertha's godmother, Miss Miriam Heronworth, has informed Mr. Lethbridge that she wishes to buy all the books," said Connie.

And at this piece of information Mrs. Lingfield grew very red in the face.

"Oh! indeed," she observed; "this is the first I have heard of any such arrangement. Miriam Heronworth had better wait till she knows whether I intend to sell the library!"

She got up and gave her cheek for her stepdaughter to kiss.

"I shall expect you to come and see me again," she said, "since I can't go to you. I am bound to tell you, my dear Connie, that I think you have made a very foolish arrangement. You have practically saddled yourself with the responsibility of Drusilla, for you know as well as I do that this idea of trying to work is bound to end in nothing! And then there is another view of the matter. I don't consider it proper that you should be there alone, just you two girls. I am quite sure your father would never have approved in the very least of what you are doing."

Miss Lingfield did not kiss her stepmother.

"I wish—" she said with sudden passion—"I wish, with all my heart and soul, that my father were here now; then perhaps there would be some little chance for Drusilla!"

"Don't lose your temper, my dear," said Mrs. Lingfield; but Connie had turned and had passed out of the room.

She walked home and gradually she got calm and cool again.

"It is so silly—so very silly to lose one's temper with mother. The fight is never equal!" she said, and she sighed even as she smiled faintly.

When she reached her house she found Lord Carlingford's card with a scribbled message on it.

"I must see you; please make an appointment."

Miss Lingfield bit her lip.

"Did you tell Miss Heronworth that Lord Carlingford had called?" she asked her parlour-maid nervously.

The servant shook her head.

"No, miss. She was lying down when he came. She complains of a very bad headache." Then the maid added: "Mr. Keston called just after you went out and Miss Heronworth saw him for a few moments."

Connie went upstairs to the drawing-room and sat down, looking at Carlingford's card in an uneasy manner.

"What shall I do?" she asked herself.

She had felt instinctively that the moment would come when she would have to see him—not in a perfunctory way, as she had done at Crowder Chase, but for a definite, a very real, purpose.

She yearned to be able to speak about him to Drusilla, yet whenever his name hovered on her lips she held it back.

Drusilla's reticence concerning Carlingford was something Connie Lingfield dared not break, and yet what was she to say to him when they met? He had told her

briefly on one of the occasions when they had spoken together at Crowder Chase, that though he called so often and was staying in the neighbourhood, he did not expect to see Drusilla.

"We had a little misunderstanding," he had said, "and—and I am afraid I—I said things that hurt her. I can't bother her now, neither can I let matters rest where they are. But I will be patient." And now it was evident his patience was coming to an end!

Connie was still sitting pondering how to act, when the drawing-room door opened and Drusilla came in.

The first thing one noticed about Drusilla in these days was the fact that she had grown so very thin. Her clothes seemed to hang on her. Then her pallor struck the eyes, she seemed colourless; there was a greyness about her as though a tangible shadow rested on her, blotting out the life and light in her eyes, her hair, her skin, and her lips.

"So you are back again," she said. "I've been lying down—at least, I have been trying to lie down; but my head was so stupidly bad I had to get up again. It's better now. Shall we have tea?"

"It is time for your medicine," said Connie, "and you eat no lunch; won't you have an egg beaten up?"

Drusilla made a face.

"I am so tired of eggs beaten up," she said plaintively; "they smell like a refreshment bar at a station. I'd rather ever so much have tea and crumpets."

She sighed as she put herself into a chair.

"Well, and how was Aunt Edith?" she asked. "I suppose she has ordered more beautiful black gowns and things? Did she send her love to me?"

Connie rang the bell and ordered tea.

"She was just her usual self," she said, a trifle wearily.

"I suppose she will get a little bit worse than usual now." "

"Yes," said Drusilla, "if that is possible."

She snuggled back into the cushions of the chair and closed her eyes for an instant, and then she opened them again.

"What did she say about me? Out with it, Connie, my sweetheart?"

"We are only in sympathy on one point," Connie answered. "Mother considers that you are absolutely unfit to attempt to be independent."

Drusilla smiled just for an instant.

"You think alike on this subject," she said, "and yet with what a difference! I can make a good guess at the sort of things you have had to listen to, poor little Connie!"

They paused a moment as the maids brought in the tea-table and appointments.

When they were alone again Drusilla said:

"You know, I am half afraid that, for once in her life, Aunt Edith is right! Naturally I shall never give her the satisfaction of knowing this, but, Connie darling, I am a useless—useless creature! There ought to be dozens of ways open to an able-bodied young woman like me in which bread, at least, could be earned; but when I put any one of these ways in front of me, hateful and shameful as the truth is, I am obliged to see that I should be no earthly good at any one of them."

"I don't call it shameful," said Connie promptly; "I call it natural."

"Now that the world is so old, surely some one might have invented some new employment for genteel fools," observed Drusilla, a little irritably. "As it is, I have to make my choice of being the inevitable governess or the

equally inevitable companion. I can't be a parlour-maid, and I am such a duffer at acting that the stage is out of the question. So it must be a governess. The trouble is," she mused, "that though I have always loved children, I shouldn't know in the very least what to do with them if they were put in my charge. And then I am such a dunce! Oh, Connie, the things I ought to learn!"

Connie sat watching the light flame restlessly under the silver kettle.

"I wonder if you will be very angry with me if I speak out my mind?" she said, after a pause.

"I daresay I shall be," said Drusilla, with just a glint of her old manner; "but since I am dependent on you for my meals, I shall have to dissemble."

Connie poured the boiling water into the teapot; then she said in a low voice:

"I think just because you love her, you—you must let us try and do what she would have done." Then hurriedly, very hurriedly, Connie said: "You know the mere suggestion of turning yourself into a governess is such a mistake."

"Yes, of course it is," Drusilla assented; but her voice was not quite steady. "I have just told you I know nothing! I can't spell, I never could tell a noun from an adverb, and I couldn't add up a sum if I tried. I might perhaps be able to invent a few conundrums for mental arithmetic, such as: 'If one boy has four herrings and a half, why does a speckled hen lay an egg before breakfast?' but that would be absolutely the extent of my capabilities. Teach—no, it is very certain I cannot teach, and I can't companion either. Is there a verb 'to companion' or not? I—I used to hate verbs, Connie; I remember in the old days Bertha always did my grammar exercises for me. What's the use of grammar, any way?"

She got up suddenly and bent her head on her arm, which she rested on the mantelpiece.

Connie poured out the tea, and then she turned with a sharp gesture :

" Oh ! dearest," she said.

And Drusilla flung out her arms suddenly.

" The sun is shining," she said brokenly. " Spring has come again, and there are flowers everywhere, and I should like to kill everything that lives and triumphs in living now that Bertha is dead ! "

And Connie took those two tense hands in hers and kissed them.

" I know—I know," she said ; " but, darling, you are going to be brave."

" I am not going to forget," said Drusilla, calming herself instantly. " Don't tell me to forget ! That is the awful part of it all, Connie. Things go on just the same. It is so cruel when she is lying in her grave ! This morning when I went out I turned into the park ; the ground seemed full of crocuses. I wanted to trample on them all ! Oh ! you see," she finished, with a laugh that was pitiful, " what an unreasonable, senseless creature I am ! I am fit for nothing—least of all for independence ! "

Connie held her in her arms just as if she were a baby. And by degrees Drusilla's outburst of grief died down. She sat in the chair again and she drank some tea feverishly. She seemed to be glad to speak.

" You know, Connie dear," she said in her tired voice, " when first I knew about things as they are, I—I made all sorts of vows to myself. I resolved that no matter how much it might hurt me, I would not do anything, except in one instance, to go against Beth's wishes ; and whilst you have been out I have been making a new vow to myself. I have realized that there is still a chance of doing something to

make her happy. *You know that it will hurt me to take this money ; but, Connie dear, it would hurt her so much more to feel that I was out in the world fighting and failing, it would seem a reproach to her if I did not fall in with what has been arranged. Aunt Edith will no doubt sum it up all differently. She will call me practical, and worldly, and sensible ; but these are a few of the things which I must bear. I give up my independence,"* she said faintly, and she leaned her head against the shoulder of the other girl ; "and I do it for Bertha's sake. I'll stay with you a little while longer, Connie."

"Only a little while ?" queried Connie Lingfield. "Well, you shall do just as you wish, darling. When you are tired of being here you shall go. Only try to get strong and to be calm. I don't want you to forget, but I do want you to try and teach yourself to remember without suffering so much."

Something in the sound of the gentle voice sent a pang of remorse through Drusilla.

She took one of Connie's hands and cradled her face on it.

"How selfish I am ! I think only of myself and my own feelings and never of you. And you have come back here only because of me ! You have opened this house, which must be so sad for you, full as it is of memories of your father, just simply on my account ! Connie dear, bear with me a little longer."

She sat for a while, leaning on Connie's hand, then she got up and went to the writing-table.

"Mr. Keston left a note for you. I suppose he thought I could not be trusted with a message."

"He is leaving town to-night," said Connie a moment later, as she glanced through the letter.

Drusilla was standing by the fire, warming first one foot

and then the other ; though the day was warm she felt cold.

"He seems to like his new work," she said a little languidly ; "but he is made of that kind of stuff which beautifies all labour just because it is labour. I don't mind anyone being honest and upright, but I object to them when they make these virtues appear as something quite original and individual."

"Mr. Keston is only sincere," Connie Lingfield said warmly.

"Exactly, and it is his very sincerity which irritates me just a little. But he is awfully kind and very reliable. Beth was so fond of him." After a little pause Drusilla spoke again : "Talk of the long arm of coincidence, Connie—could anything have been stranger than the fate which brought Mr. Keston to Crowder Chase?" The next moment she said : "But I suppose it is not so funny really, only just the proper working out of destiny. You must not think I don't like him. I believe I am just a little bit afraid of him ; he is so difficult to humbug."

Connie put away the subject of Keston as she folded up his note.

"Darling," she said, "I must answer Lady Deravan's last letter. Don't you think in a little while, a month hence, it would do you good to go and stay with her at Braske?"

Drusilla moved sharply from the fireplace.

"No!" she answered shortly ; and then again she said : "No! I don't want to go anywhere, and I don't want to see anyone but you. Just tell Kitty the truth ; then she will understand there is no use in asking me. Say it nicely, Connie dear, but say it definitely."

She had walked across the room and now she passed out

of it. Perhaps even Connie, notwithstanding her wonderful sympathy, could not quite understand how the very name of the old house where she had been so happy, and where love had come to her so unexpectedly, had power to wound Drusilla !

CHAPTER XXII.

MISS LINGFIELD appointed a meeting with Lord Carlingford two days later at the offices of Mr. Lethbridge, and she did this without any apology or explanation. To bring him to the house whilst Drusilla was there seemed to her impossible.

Carlingford was waiting for her when she drove to Clement's Inn to keep the appointment. He thanked her so warmly for coming that Connie felt remorse for the reluctance with which she had started out on this journey.

"I am not going to ask you now to tell me anything which may touch on private matters. I only want to ask you to answer a few questions," the young man said very gently.

"I will answer them if I can," said Connie.

She saw a great change in him : the blight which had fallen on Drusilla seemed as though it had touched him also. They were so ~~far~~, far away from those two radiantly happy figures at Crowder Chase !

Carlingford spoke at first about his father, whose illness had been reported in the papers.

"My mother has been very anxious, but happily the improvement is sustained. This, in conjunction with other things, has changed the outlook for me very con-

siderably." With a slight pause Carlingford said tersely : " I've given up soldiering, and I am going to try and make myself useful. A long time ago I wanted my father to let me take over the handling of most of his estates, but he refused. Now his illness practically demands my active attention to his affairs. But I don't mind," he added quickly, " I want to have plenty to do."

And then he spoke of Drusilla.

" If you could know how I grieve about her. Is she bearing up ? "

" Yes, she is bearing up," said Connie, " but she is very, very unhappy. Of course, she is not well."

Carlingford was sitting, leaning forward with his hands clasped between his knees.

" If only I had known ! If only I had guessed that things were going in such a cruel groove how differently I would have acted ! " he said slowly. " I was such a fool, Connie, that night—such a fool ! "

Connie said nothing, but her heart began to beat quickly, for they were drawing nearer to the dangerous ground now.

" And yet it was so natural. She maddened me ! She seemed to want to make me wild. I have thought the whole thing over and over again. Every word we spoke I can remember—every inflection of her voice—and on my soul I *can't* understand why she wanted to quarrel. Does she ever speak of me ? " he queried abruptly.

Connie Lingfield said " No " in a whisper.

The young man sat back in his chair now ; he was frowning.

" And you—do you speak of me to her ? "

Connie merely shook her head.

Carlingford felt the colour rush to his face.

"This is one of the questions I want you to answer if you can. Why don't you speak about me to Drusilla?"

Connie looked at him half-pleadingly, and then said:

"Because I am afraid."

"Afraid?"

Lord Carlingford stared for an instant at the girl opposite with a strange expression in his eyes.

"Afraid," he repeated. "Why? Is it because you think Drusilla would resent your approaching the subject, or because there is another reason?"

Miss Lingfield sat a moment in silence; then she said:

"There are many reasons why I hesitate to speak about you, Jim—and yet I want you to believe me if you can," she added most earnestly, "that not a day passes in which I am not tempted to do this."

He was silent now.

"I am grateful to you," he said when he spoke again. He got up and went to the window, and then he turned round.

"I have tried to convince myself that she was in earnest that night, Connie, but I can't! It was such a foolish quarrel. Drusilla must know things can't rest where they are. She means everything in life to me; I can't and I won't lose her! I told you that I would be patient, and, indeed, I am prepared to wait for years if only I have the satisfaction of knowing that Drusilla will come back to me in the end. Won't you help me to get at this understanding? Won't you help me to let her realize that I am here waiting—waiting; that I shall wait all my life?"

Connie's eyes were full of tears.

"I will do what I can," she faltered, "but, Jim—I cannot promise you anything; there is more in this than you know."

"Ah!" exclaimed Carlingford, and his face lit up. "At last I am getting at the truth! I was certain that there was something below the surface—something which influenced Drusilla—which, perhaps, explains everything! Dear Connie, don't look at me so nervously; I won't make a move of any sort. I will just wait on and on—— But you have put a sense of life into me, and if you have not given me any definite hope you have at least taken from me that sense of mystifying helplessness which was corroding the best and healthiest part of me."

He took both of Connie's hands and he pressed them warmly.

"Where you can help me," he said, "is to speak of me to Drusilla. Let her talk—even if it makes her angry, let her talk. And, Connie dear, keep well before her the knowledge of my right to share all that is in her life. If all had gone on as we hoped, we should have been married by now. I regard her as much my wife as though we had been married. When two people stand so closely together as that there can be no question of separating for some idle reason or angry quarrel. Of my own free will I will never renounce my claim to her!"

As he took Connie downstairs to her carriage he told her that his people knew nothing of what had passed between himself and Drusilla.

"Poor Beth's death has been an ample explanation for everything. Then my father's illness has occupied all my mother's thoughts. If Flora had been on the spot things might have been different," the young man added with a faint smile; "but by good luck she and Torchester went south some weeks ago, and they talk of doing a tour round the world. Before they come home I mean to have made everything all right again."

His confidence was very cheering, but as he put her

into the brougham and she drove away, Connie lost the reflection of his optimism, and she remembered her promise to help him with nervousness.

"He little imagines how difficult it will be," she said to herself.

Several days later Miss Lingfield wrote to Lord Carlingford:

"I know you will be expecting to hear from me. I am sorry, but it has been quite impossible for me to do what you want me to do. Drusilla has been very unwell. It is nothing really serious, but Dr. Redgood, whom I sent for at once because he has always doctored her, insists that Drusilla must be kept absolutely quiet. She is to see no one except myself occasionally, and she is to have a trained nurse with her all the time. Dr. Redgood hopes that this kind of rest-cure will completely restore her. She seems glad to lie in bed, and is so good, doing everything she is told, and trying to get better. Yesterday something very pleasant happened. I don't know if Beth ever spoke to you of two great-aunts of hers, one of whom was her godmother, who live in the Lake District? Well, these two old ladies have been such dears to Drusilla, and yesterday they wrote to say that whilst the younger one, Miriam, had settled to buy the big library, and all the books which poor Beth had loved, the elder sister, Sophia, had made an offer for Crowder Chase and all it contains, and that my stepmother had signified her intention of accepting both offers. This has brought a touch of real joy to Drusilla. I know she has been fretting at the thought that the old house and all the things which belonged to her happy childhood might pass into the hands of strangers."

Lord Carlingford was in Yorkshire when this letter reached him. He read it through slowly many times, and each time a certain impression deepened.

In her innocent desire to give him agreeable news, Connie had unconsciously and very significantly added to that confession which had fallen so involuntarily from her lips a few days ago.

Dimly the man began to decipher the truth. Of course, he lacked the essential elements with which to form the shape in which that truth would later on present itself to him, but he snatched eagerly now at the certainty that the barrier which Drusilla had built up between herself and her love was one founded, not on a paltry fickleness of disposition, as she would have had him believe, but on a much more serious matter, something which Carlingford felt instinctively had been introduced suddenly to her knowledge, and might, indeed, have partaken even of the nature of a revelation.

He marvelled now that some such suggestion had not come to him before; for casting things over and over in his mind, he remembered so much that might have awakened his curiosity and perhaps provoked a suspicion that all was not working smoothly. There had been, for instance, that strange bitterness and hostility on Mrs. Lingfield's part towards Drusilla, a feeling which the girl herself had discussed with him so freely, and more especially at the time of Edmund Lingfield's death. Then there had been that subtle suggestion of some anxiety, some trouble wearing and shadowing poor Bertha!

Had he not many a time felt that she was fretting in undue fashion about Drusilla's forthcoming separation from herself? And yet she had urged a nearer date for the marriage!

A memory of the day Beth and he had lunched together

at that little restaurant in Soho came back vividly to Carlingford's mind now. He recalled how, just for a moment, Bertha's statement as to the settlement she intended making on her sister had caused him to wonder. The matter had, however, seemed so unimportant in a sense, that he had not given it another thought. As he had told Drusilla that bygone morning when she had pretended to cross-examine him, money in connection with herself had no existence or significance. But now Bertha's declaration that she had intended to settle half of all she possessed on Drusilla assumed different proportions.

"There is money at the root of this mystery," he said to himself as he read and re-read Connie's letter; and then he added: "but there is something more than money."

It was abundantly clear to him that her sister's death had not enriched Drusilla, for had she been wealthy there would have been no necessity for these two old relatives to have stepped in and prevented poor Bertha's property from passing into the hands of strangers. But this was not the phase of the situation which held Carlingford; there was something more than this; something deeper and more vital—something, he said, with a thrill at his heart, which Drusilla did not intend him to know.

Money alone would not have divided them. "A yearning to beat down this invisible barrier surged passionately in the man's heart.

He wrote by return to Connie Lingfield:

"I told you I would be patient, but I find I over-rated my powers in this respect. I will wait till she is well again; then I shall see her and plead for myself!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

KESTON was in London again when Drusilla was pronounced convalescent. His new duties kept him closely occupied, so that he had but little leisure, and he, therefore, called very rarely on Miss Lingfield. But he wrote frequently, and Connie had sent him regular news of the invalid.

"We shall go abroad as soon as Drusilla feels equal to travelling. Dr. Redgood sends her out in the air now as often as she will go, but though she is so much better, she seems to have lost all interest in things," Connie wrote on one occasion. "Her bodily strength has come back, but I feel sometimes as if her spirit had gone for ever."

Brian Keston answered this letter in person one sunshiny afternoon.

He was going north again on the morrow, and this was his only chance of seeing Miss Lingfield.

He found her in her carriage just starting for a drive. She would have alighted and entered with him, but Keston would not permit this.

"I just wanted to see you for a moment, if possible." Then he said, "and to see Miss Heronworth also."

"Drusilla is out," Miss Lingfield said; "this is one of her wandering days: the sort of day when I never interfere

with her. She does just exactly what she wants, goes where she likes, and is not expected to answer any questions. But she will be back at tea-time. Won't you come back too ? "

He shook his head.

" No ; I leave early in the morning and I am due to have tea with my mother."

" Drusilla will be sorry to have missed you," said Miss Lingfield ; " she was speaking of you only last night. Perhaps if you go into the Park and then towards Kensington Gardens you may meet her."

Brian watched the carriage drive away, and then followed Connie's advice. He walked for nearly half an hour, looking eagerly about him, and then he saw Drusilla. She was walking very slowly. At sight of him she pulled up in almost startled fashion. Then she gave him a smile of real welcome.

" I've been walking miles and miles and miles," she said, " and I am not a bit tired yet."

He contradicted her.

" I think you are very tired," he said. " I noticed that as I saw you coming towards me."

" How on earth can you know I am tired if I say I am not ? " Drusilla asked him crossly.

His heart leaped at that first note of the old petulance.

" Because," he said, " I don't believe you know anything about yourself one way or another."

" Shall we sit down ? If you are going to preach I shall feel tired at once," Drusilla answered to this.

" I should be glad to preach if I felt you would listen."

" That is a pretty way of wrapping things up," said Drusilla. " Why don't you say, ' If I felt you had the sense to understand ' ? Mr. Keston, if you only know it,

I have been hanging on to you as a source of consolation ! Because," she explained, " when the whole of a family unite in finding a person a fool, and an uneducated one into the bargain, and club together to prevent this fool from starving, it is desirable to have one person to stand up for the fool ! So I have been comforting myself by saying to myself, ' Now, Mr. Keston knows I really *am* clever, because Mr. Keston has been educating me.' Do you remember the day I asked you how to spell ' disappointment ' ? "

" If we sit here a moment," said Keston, " we shall be out of the wind and can make believe that it isn't cold. It was a happy chance to have met you, for I wanted to have five minutes' conversation with you before going north to-morrow."

" You are going away again ! " said Drusilla. " I am sorry."

He bit his lip.

" Are you ? " Without waiting for any further word from her he went on hurriedly : " Yes, I am going away again. I am not sorry to leave town, though it is a bit bleak in the North ; but it is the country, and that always appeals to me."

" I am sorry you are going," said Drusilla a second time.

And the man asked her almost roughly :

" Why do you say that ? "

She shrugged her shoulders.

" Because it is the truth, and because of another reason."

Drusilla had thrown back her veil. She turned and looked at him as she said : " I don't want you to go, because you can be useful to me. You are the one person I can talk to. The one person, oddly enough, who understands,

really and truly, what—what everything means to me just now ; therefore, it is natural I should be sorry when you tell me you are going away, isn't it ?”

“ You know, of course,” Keston said, “ that no matter where I go, I can always return if you want me.”

“ That is very good of you,” Drusilla answered ; “ but it isn't the same as having you on the spot to be called for when wanted ! ”

He caught his breath and shivered.

“ Won't you speak out now—won't you tell me everything ? ”

She paused a moment, and then said, in a voice that brought tears to his eyes :

“ Oh ! I suffer—*I suffer* ! And you know, don't you, that it is not only for myself that I suffer ? Mr. Keston, she was so proud—so just—so wonderfully good—it has been a kind of agony to me to hear her criticized, to have her actions questioned ! *I* have never wanted to know why, with all her marvellous business capacity, her perception, she should not have left things definitely settled when she died ! She did not think she was going to die, and where I was concerned you know what was in her heart.” She brushed her hot, tired eyes ; then she said : “ I have done everything, obeyed every order, because it seems to me I can give her peace if I do all this ; she is with me so tangibly, so actually at times——” After a long pause, in which the man's silence was so eloquent to Drusilla, she said : “ When Mr. Lethbridge told me there was no will, I could have struck him ! Not for giving me the information, but for keeping it from me till it was too late to let her know how little it meant to me ! All those days when she was dying, she was fighting for just one hour of coherent speech—for strength—and she only wanted this hour to put things right for me. Imagine how I should

have striven to put peace into her heart—dear, true, loving creature that she was ! ”

Keston ventured to lay his hand for an instant on one of hers.

“ The peace is there now,” he said.

Drusilla had put up her veil and was looking across the sunlit park, and he sat and looked at her, at the delicate face which had grown so pinched and wistful ; at the shadowed eyes, and the lips which quivered from time to time, but never with smiles in these days.

Suddenly she looked round at him.

“ I want you to do me a favour—just a little one.”

“ At least, ask me what you know I can do.”

“ Oh ! you can do this. Bertha told me that Aunt Edith had seen your mother, and had put an idea in Lady Draycott's mind which was troubling you. Well, you know, I think it was very natural that Lady Draycott should have had such an idea, and I—I—am going to ask you to help me to do something I very much want to do. Uncle Edmund left me many jewels which once had belonged to my mother. I want Lady Draycott to have these ; they—they can't give back to her all that she lost, but they really do belong to her. Now you are furious ! ” Drusilla finished nervously.

“ It is horrible of you to be so cruel ! ” Keston answered her passionately. “ My God ! as if things were not bad enough as they are ! ”

Drusilla's pale face flushed.

“ I don't want to be cruel. I only want to try to right a big wrong by the very small means in my power.”

Bright Keston got up, stood irresolutely a second or two as if he would leave her, and then sat down again.

“ If you will permit me to advise you,” he said very

quietly, "I earnestly counsel you not to do this. My mother a long time ago outgrew all recollection of what happened when my father was alive. Just for a moment, through the malice and gossip of a foolish and spiteful woman, her interest was roused in these old things, but this interest was happily stamped out, and I can undertake to assure you now that she has once again forgotten the old days. There is much in her present life to keep remembrance in the background."

Drusilla sighed.

"All of which means that I am to mind my own business, doesn't it?"

"Yes—if you like to put it that way."

Then he looked at her.

"It is my turn now to entreat a favour. I want you also to forget! Not your life of happiness and love with Bertha Heronworth, but the life which existed before you were born. If you really and truly wish to serve her, here is your chance. You have simply to put out of your remembrance all that you were told by Mrs. Lingfield, and to rise superior to hysterical resolutions."

"It is so easy to say this kind of thing!"

"No, it is not easy," he contradicted her; "neither is it easy to do, but it can be done if one is determined."

"I am so tired," Drusilla said, as he paused and, in truth, she spoke wearily. "I don't want to be determined or to do anything but go to sleep. I have had one month in bed and now I want six more!"

Keston moved restlessly; then he said almost coldly:

"Of course you are tired, because you are attempting the impossible."

He looked at her as he spoke, and Drusilla coloured hotly for an instant.

"I am not sure that I know what you mean," she said, but he answered in that same quiet way—

"I am very sure you do understand me, and thoroughly. You are passing through a natural, perhaps an inevitable, phase just now; you are strung up to attempt deeds of sacrifice, and you attribute your motives to righteous and noble sentiments, whereas they are really a cloak for one form of selfishness. If you want to do your duty, there are one or two matters, particularly one, clamouring close to your hand to be done."

She was very white now and was trembling a little; then she began to pull on her glove, which she had been patting and smoothing unconsciously.

"It seems I was wrong just now when I said that you were the one person who understood—things, for—for you are hopelessly wrong. If—if you did understand——" she broke off; "and I relied on you," she said then in a whisper. "I have just been living lately in the faith that you would sympathize so surely, that you would help me."

He had turned his face away again, and he bit his lip sharply, but he said nothing; he knew there was more to come from her heart, and in a little while it came.

"Of course—I know, *quite* well what you mean when you talk of duties to be done. After all, you—you are looking at things as Bertha did. It seems awfully queer to me that you should do this; but—" she buttoned her glove, and then said as distinctly as she could—"there are some things which are *impossible*. That is how I regard the duties, or, at least, the one particular duty you want me to do."

Keston got up.

"I don't think you ought to sit here any longer; there

is a sting in the wind which means treachery and possible influenza."

She got up obediently.

"Your sermon was so interesting," she said. "I never knew there was a sting in the wind."

As they walked away she said:

"And so you are going north again to-morrow, and we shall not see you again for ages and ages?"

"That depends. I told you just a little while ago, I am always at your disposition if there is any way in which I can serve you."

"Oh! if I want you, be very sure I shall send for you! Please be prepared."

After a little while Drusilla said:

"I am not going to bear you any malice, although you have disappointed me awfully."

Keston laughed.

"I want to rouse you, to wake you to realities. You have played with life all this time, now you must put play aside."

"What do you want me to do?" Drusilla asked him in an exasperated way. "Goodness knows! I am ready and willing to work if some one will only give me a chance! I—I think it's rather beastly of you to say these sort of things when you know how idiotically useless I am!"

"The idea of earning your living is one of those quixotic emotions which have no value," Brian Keston said coldly; "and to grumble at your dependence is not only foolish, but wicked. When I tell you to put play aside, I am not urging you to take to some menial occupation as an alternative. But—" he said, with a touch of passion, breaking the regularity of his voice, "but you know so well what I mean. You may try not to see, not to hear, not to understand, but you know all the time."

"Good-bye," said Drusilla. "I am going to have that cab."

She gave him her hand, and he held it loosely for an instant ; then he stooped and kissed it.

Then he put her into the cab, and it began to move on, to mingle with the traffic. Just for a moment he had a fugitive glimpse of her black-robed figure ; then the driver whipped up his horse and the cab turned the corner.

CHAPTER XXIV.

WHEN they were at dinner Drusilla spoke of having met Keston in the Park that afternoon.

"I am so glad he found you," Connie said, "he seemed anxious to see you before going away."

"He had nothing of importance to say, but he managed to preach quite a decent sermon. He ought to have gone into the Church! All the same," Drusilla added, "I am rather sorry he has had to leave town again so soon."

"Are you?" queried Connie. "Why?"

Drusilla did not answer immediately. Then she said:

"I have arrived at a certain determination, but it requires Mr. Keston to make that determination a fact."

"I don't understand you," Connie said. And Drusilla smiled.

"No, darling, I know you don't."

They waited till the maids had left the room before speaking again. It was Drusilla who broke the silence.

"I have been rather impatient with you, Connie, because you haven't even guessed at—at this determination. And yet to me it seems natural. It is just a simple question of duty."

"Duty!" Connie repeated the word, frowning a little; then she asked: "And you associate Mr. Keston with this duty?"

Drusilla made no immediate answer; the faintest of faint colours had dawned in her cheeks.

"Naturally, Connie dear; the matter does not lie in my hands, although I know what I ought to do."

"You talk in riddles," Connie Lingfield said a trifle coldly.

"I would prefer to keep the subject in riddle form, but that is not possible. I want Mr. Keston to remain in town, Connie, because I—I am tired of beating things about in my own poor little brain, and because the sooner he makes up his mind to ask me to marry him the better it will be for everyone!"

Connie looked as she felt, thunderstruck.

"Marry! You are talking of marrying Brian Keston?"

"Only if he asks me, *bien entendu*, but if he does ask me, yes!"

"I should like to know your reason?"

Drusilla shrugged her shoulders.

"There are several reasons."

"Perhaps," said Connie a little coldly; "but what sort of reasons?"

"I will give you two to go on with: Because I feel I ought to marry him, and because we may presume he would be of my opinion if he asks me! Those are two excellent reasons, my dear Connie."

The other girl looked at her in perplexity and then said, halting a little as she spoke:

"To marry a man one must care for him."

"It is not absolutely necessary," Drusilla answered carelessly. "I daresay if we could only know the truth about lots of marriages we should discover that the husbands and wives never troubled to find out if they cared or not. Being in love is a servant's prerogative like a bank holiday."

Miss Lingfield remained silent for a moment.

"I am sure," she said eventually, "that Mr. Keston hasn't the least idea of such a thing as this!"

"Connie dear," said Drusilla, "you know it's rather a tall order to arrogate to ourselves a perfect knowledge of what is passing in the minds of other people. Why, we can't keep pace with our own thoughts—at least, I know I can't with mine—so how can we construe the thoughts of others? My own impression is, that Mr. Keston has pictured me already boiling his potatoes and darning his socks. But then, again, I may be all wrong! Very probably he detests me! That is beside the question, however. What really matters is that if he wants to marry me—I shall say yes."

Then Connie went and stood very close to Drusilla.

"I know," she said in a soft voice. "I understand—you think because your father did a great wrong to his father that if you sacrifice your own happiness you will be doing something to right that old wrong. It is a beautiful thought, Drusilla; but, darling, like many beautiful things, it isn't practicable."

Drusilla got up very quickly, displacing the hand which Connie had laid so affectionately on her shoulder.

"I don't expect you or anyone to understand just how I feel in all that concerns my father," she said in a stifled kind of way. There was a note of passion in her voice, but she controlled this. "I—I can't give back the money that was taken from so many people," she said. "I can only do what is possible."

Connie drew a deep breath.

"This is, surely a fantastical idea of duty! The man to whom you really owe duty is the man you love—the man who loves you!"

Drusilla put out her hand protestingly.

"There is no such man," she said in a low voice.

She turned round sharply and moved as though to go out of the room, but Connie, hurrying forward, stood between her and the door.

"Drusilla dear, I am going to speak out—I must speak. You are doing a great, great wrong to yourself and to Jim; and now you would propose doing an even greater wrong to Mr. Keston. It's all very well for you to plan a future with Brian Keston, but if he is what I believe him to be, he is the last man on earth to ask you to be his wife!"

"That, again, is only your supposition, Connie," Drusilla said gently.

But Connie was on fire now.

"No—no—it is not merely supposition; I *know* this man; believe me, he would be incapable of doing anything dishonourable."

Drusilla blushed hotly.

"And you consider it would be dishonourable to want to marry me?"

"Naturally," the other girl answered firmly. "Since Mr. Keston knows that you are the promised wife of another man."

Drusilla went back to the table and sat down; she said nothing. The hot blood lingered for a while in her face. Connie went on speaking.

"And even if Jim did not exist, I doubt if Mr. Keston would care to marry any woman who became his wife simply to satisfy a sense of duty. In my opinion," said Connie distinctly, "he deserves a better kind of wife." She paused to take breath, and then moved away from the door. She felt now that Drusilla would hear her out, and as she sat down she began speaking of Carlingford.

"Before you were ill I promised Jim I would do all I

could to help him. I promised to remind you of his right to share all that came and went in your life. I could not keep my promise at once because Dr. Redgood prohibited any excitement, and after that because I lacked courage; but now, even if it hurts you, I am going to speak to you about Jim. I am going to tell you that you must deal straightforwardly with him, Drusilla, that you *must* tell him the truth." She leaned forward and stretched out her hand across the table imploringly. "Oh! darling," she said, "do you think I don't know what this will cost you? Do you suppose I care to say things like this to you? I only want to be able to put some peace into your heart and I want to give Jim peace, too."

"You have seen him, then?"

Connie nodded her head.

"Frequently—he writes nearly every day. Drusilla, he loves you; he refuses to be put out of your life. Darling, you *must* tell him everything!"

"And if I refuse?" asked Drusilla, not angrily, but in a voice that had the sound of tears in it.

"You won't refuse—you can't. If you can see a duty in so distant a matter as the righting of a wrong done to Mr. Keston's father—you cannot shut your eyes to the duty you owe Carlingford. Do you realize that if nothing had happened you would have been his wife by now?"

Drusilla sat a long time in silence.

"It's queer," she said when she spoke, "how easily one can muddle things, Connie. I wanted to do the rightest—the most honourable—thing, and I have only succeeded in doing wrong all round, apparently. And everybody denounces me! Mr. Keston jumped on me in the Park to-day and you are jumping on me now. It—it isn't exactly amusing to be jumped on, Connie!"

She stretched out her hand as she spoke, and met and clasped that other small hand which she had refused to see before.

"Don't hate me," Connie said, and her lips quivered.

They sat hand in hand for a spell; then Drusilla got up.

"I suppose, since you are all of the same opinion, I must be in the wrong, but to me it seemed so clear—such a definite duty—I am not what I was when Jim asked me to marry him."

"That is where you are wrong, Drusilla dearest—you are just what you were. I wish you would talk the whole thing out with Jim—he is waiting, and he means to wait. Don't keep him waiting too long."

"But——" Drusilla did not say what was hovering on her lips, for at that moment one of the maids entered the room.

"If you please, miss," she said, addressing Connie, "Miss Heronworth's maid, Catherine, is here. She would be glad to speak to you and Miss Drusilla."

"Catherine!" Drusilla said the word almost like a cry.

"We will go to the drawing-room. Ask Catherine to come to us there."

Connie linked her arm in Drusilla's, and they mounted the stairs together.

"I dread seeing Catherine," Drusilla said as she paused an instant for breath. "I know she—she blamed me for everything. She was so cruel to me when the illness began."

"She nearly broke her heart over you when we came away from Crowder Chase," Connie said, eager as usual to drive away shadows.

The meeting between Beth's loving, faithful servant and Drusilla was pathetic. The girl went forward with

outstretched hands, but Catherine just took her in her arms and kissed her again and again.

"Oh, dear!" she said; "oh, dear! but I've just ached for the sight of you, Miss Drusilla!—my heart's been cold and empty waitin' there in that barren old house and wonderin' what was doing with you."

There was something motherly and soothing and indescribably comforting in the clasp of Catherine's arms; the sound of her voice brought back visions of hours which had been so homely and so sweet. Almost Drusilla could fancy she saw Beth smiling at her in the old tender fashion.

It was a moment of childhood given back unexpectedly, and the restless anguish of her heart seemed to cease and grow calm under this commonplace, yet beautifying, influence.

Catherine had many questions to ask and much to tell. She had remained at Crowder Chase at Connie's request. It had been the girl's intention to have bought all the contents of Bertha's bedroom and given these well-loved things to Drusilla. The prompt action, however, of the two old Miss Heronworths had rendered this unnecessary. Still, Catherine had remained on, faithful to her trust, and now she had only come away because the new mistress had charged her with an errand to Drusilla.

"You see, miss, when—when I saw the end was coming, I locked Miss Beth's desk after I'd shut away all the papers, and I kept the key. Well, then, Mr. Lethbridge he come and asked for the key for to go through them papers and see if there was aught there as Miss Beth had left with instructions, or such-like. And they couldn't find nothing—not a line, and she, poor dear! lying there just frettin' and killin' herself because she knew they'd look after she'd gone and find nothing!"

He broke down and cried again, and the two girls tried to comfort her.

"Tell us why you have come now," Drusilla asked a little while later. She was sitting close to Catherine, and the maid was holding her hand.

"It was this way, Miss Drusilla. As soon as Miss Sophia Heronworth came back again I knew it was going to be all right for me and the other old servants. Well, miss, she treated us just as if we was her friends, and she said we was all to stay on, and just keep the house going as it used to be kept, because she hoped, and that soon, to persuade Miss Drusilla to go back there to stay. And then, Miss Connie, I took the liberty of speaking about Miss Beth's room, and how you'd meant to have bought everything for Miss Drusilla—the old lady she just nodded her head, and then she said, 'Well, they belong to Miss Drusilla now.' And then, miss, she said as she'd like to take something away with her as a kind of remembrance of Miss Beth, and I suggested the blotter and the pen as she'd always used, poor dear, and Miss Sophia Heronworth was very pleased. 'I doubt if I'll keep them a very long time', Catherine," she said to me as I give them to her; 'for I am old, and they shall come back to Miss Drusilla.' And it were just that what brought me up to you in this way."

"And now that you have come, Catherine, I hope you will be able to stay and look after Miss Drusilla. She has missed you so much," Connie Lingfield said in her gentle way.

Catherine thanked her gratefully. "I'd like to do it, miss, I'd ask for nothing better; but I'll have to put the matter to Miss Sophia, because, as things stand, I am left at Crowder Chase to look after everything. Well, Miss Drusilla, you'll wonder what it is as has brought

me." She put her hand into the pocket of her coat and produced a small white flat packet. "A letter come this morning from Miss Sophia and inside there was another letter. Here it is."

Drusilla took the envelope which Catherine unfolded from the white paper. She winced as she saw the handwriting. It was in Eertha's familiar and precise characters, written, however, in pencil, and was addressed to Carlingford.

"It seems," said Catherine, "as that letter had got tucked away under the lining in the old blotter, and Miss Sophia found it when she'd got it home. Perhaps it isn't of no account, but all the same she told me to bring it to you, Miss Drusilla, as you'd be sure to know whether to send it on to his lordship or not. Miss Sophia, she was most special about me bringin' it to you myself, miss."

Drusilla got up and walked to the far end of the room. Tears were scalding her eyes, she held the letter to her breast and then to her hot lips, and the yearning for the tangible presence of the woman she had called sister came back to torture her once again.

She sat apart while Connie and the old servant talked together in low voices, and a curious feeling came upon her as she crouched back in the chair and the burning tears rolled down her cheeks.

She felt as though everything that was real and tangible about her faded into a mist; the warmth and the light of the room and the whisper of the voices were shut away by that mist and she and Beth were alone together! It was not Beth of the happy, placid, sunshiny days, it was the Beth of that bleak morning (when they had sat together in the quiet bedroom and had faced the truth) upon whom she looked in this strange moment of trance.

The hungry entreaty, the loving anguish, which had lived

in Bertha's eyes that morning and had escaped her in every word she had uttered, were poignantly clear now in this vision of her

Just for a brief spell this sense of an actual communion with one who had loved her with such an uncommon love dominated Drusilla ; then it began to leave her and slowly the mist cleared and she knew she was alone. But if that close and clear vision of Beth passed something remained, a sense of knowledge, a sense of remorse, and a sense of responsibility.

Drusilla brushed the tears from her eyes and looked down at the letter lying in her hand. She realized that this was no ordinary letter, but that in the frail paper envelope there lay a document of the greatest importance, no less indeed, than that very confession which she had denied Carlingford the right to hear.

It was not possible, of course, to guess with any assurance as to when this letter had been written, but what seemed to her most probable was that in that long weary night following on Mrs. Lingfield's revelation of the truth Bertha must have sat and framed the story which had to be told. It was evident at least, that she had intended to give the letter to Carlingford herself, that was why she had not sent it by post, but had slipped it into the blotter, keeping it in reserve till he came, or perhaps till she had spoken once more with Drusilla.

It had lain hidden long enough, now it must go to him and Drusilla would send it herself. Her hesitation was at an end, the truth would go forward.

It was a long time before Connie ventured to approach Drusilla. She had taken Catherine out of the room, and had given instructions that she should be installed comfortably for the night ; and all this had been done and yet Drusilla had not moved.

The hour was getting late and the girl was still regarded as an invalid. Connie stood by the fire and looked doubtfully—anxiously, indeed—into that dim corner where Drusilla sat, and after a long pause she walked across the room.

Drusilla got up at her approach ; she placed one hand to her head and stood for an instant dazed, and then she said with a faint smile :

" Yes, I know it is getting late, and you want me to go to bed, but there is something I have to do, Connie, before I go to bed. This has come to me from Beth, and I must send it on."

She gave the letter into Connie's hands and went across to the writing-table.

" Where do you address Jim ? " she asked in a low voice, as she sat down.

" He is in Yorkshire, or was, two days ago, when I last heard."

Connie put the letter down on the table and moved back to the fire.

" Don't tire yourself," she said to Drusilla.

And Drusilla answered :

" No, this doesn't tire me."

She wrote quite naturally :

" Connie tells me that you are waiting to hear from me, that you intend to wait. I am very, very sorry that I have treated you so unkindly. I know now you must have guessed that there was something which I did not want to share with you, hurting me and spoiling everything. I am not sure whether you will quite understand my motive in keeping this something from you, but I hope you will. Oddly enough, just to-night, when Connie spoke about you for the first time and made me see what

I have tried to avoid seeing before, that it is my positive duty to put everything before you straightforwardly, a strange circumstance has happened. Catherine has just come up from Crowder Chase and brought the enclosed letter. It was written to you by my dearest Beth, I believe, the night before she was taken ill, and it would have reached you long before this, only that it was hidden in her old blotter. I think Beth wanted to tell you all about me. When you have read this letter will you let me know if I am right? Then, if it should not contain this little story, I will tell it to you myself."

She signed this and addressed it boldly; and then she held it out to Connie.

"I want it to go at once," she said. "I—I have kept him waiting such a long, long time, and now—I want him to have this as soon as he can get it."

CHAPTER XXV.

LORD CARLINGFORD was not in Yorkshire when Drusilla's letter reached its destination ; he had left the day before for Scotland. In saddling himself with the responsibility of looking into his father's affairs, the young man had undertaken more than he was prepared for. A certain amount of disorder he had anticipated, for Lord Southborne was proverbially improvident ; and had from his boyhood adopted a careless attitude to all business matters. But the chaos which prevailed was something which Carlingford had not anticipated. Of course, he had known that his father's extravagances and losses, especially on the turf, must have swallowed up a vast amount of money. He had, further, known through his mother that there were times when the cost of life was so great that many things which should have fallen naturally into place for his sisters and herself had had to be eschewed : as, for instance, a season in town or any foreign travelling. Where Lord Southborne himself had been concerned there had never been any hesitation or question of sacrifice ; money had always been found somewhere or other, and the certain knowledge that his easy-going methods conduced to dishonesty in those who served him had not troubled him in the very least. Lord Southborne's weakness

had always been to pose as a *grand seigneur*; he loved to be surrounded by a retinue of expensive useless people, and to play the part of a king in his own domain, never counting the cost. In resigning his commission and cutting himself adrift from a social soldier's career, Carlingford had acted not merely on the impulse of circumstance. The possibilities of active military service would have found him only too keen to remain in the Army, but he had grown a little tired of parade and pretence, and his father's illness gave him the opportunity he needed of occupying himself in some more strenuous way. There had always been a deeper drift in Carlingford's mind than people who admired him as a handsome popular man-about-town could have imagined. He had allowed his life to be planned out for him in the beginning, and, indeed, had found this life pleasant enough at first; but he had gradually grown into the habit of thinking things out for himself, and the way his thoughts had drifted would have been a great astonishment, and perhaps not a pleasant one, for Lord Southborne, could he have realized what was happening. As it was, though there was a bond of real affection there had never been any very great sympathy between Carlingford and his father; their outlook lay so very far apart. Consternation reigned among the numerous Southborne estate officials when Lord Carlingford took up the management of his father's varied and valuable interests. It had been the easiest matter in the world to hoodwink the older man; there was no possibility of doing anything but "go straight" with the younger.

The condition of Lord Southborne's health imposed on his son a greater responsibility than he would have assumed if there had been the faintest chance of the sick man being restored to something like his former powers

but to all intents and purposes Lord Southborne was a dead man, and so his son reigned in his stead.

Those who had known Lord Carlingford a year or so before had to make new acquaintance with him now. He brought to bear his tactical and organizing knowledge—the fruits of his military education—upon the situation; corruption was cut out with the knife, carelessness treated drastically; if he could not put back what had been wasted and stolen, he could, at least, prevent further devastation and dishonesty, and this he was resolved upon doing.

Even his mother did not recognize him in these days. She had always known that her boy was thorough, that he never did things by halves; she also knew that he could be obstinate, and that he had a strong will; but, like his father, she had never realized that there were elements in Carlingford that go to form a worker as well as a fighter. His broad views on those great and fundamental questions which always confront humanity would have shocked Lady Southborne, it is to be feared; but fortunately she was not called upon to discuss either political or ethical or psychological matters with Lord Carlingford. Her time was taken up in looking after her girls, writing innumerable letters, and sitting by the bedside of her helpless husband. Nevertheless, something of the change in all which surrounded her did creep by degrees to Lady Southborne. There seemed to be a briskness in the method of those who attended on her: one felt the existence of a master hand without perhaps being able to define exactly whence this mastership emanated.

To Carlingford himself his new duties came as a god-send. Bertha Heronworth's death, following so swiftly on that miserable misunderstanding with Drusilla, had oppressed him painfully. He mourned for Bertha, but

his sorrow for Drusilla outweighed all other feeling. Indeed, he had scarcely dared let himself imagine how the girl would support this tragedy. Till that day when he and Connie Lingfield had met at Mr. Lethbridge's office Carlingford had tormented himself with trying in vain to find the real meaning which lay below all that Drusilla had said to him that night at Croyder Chase. He had almost immediately realized that something had been working in her heart which was influencing Drusilla most strangely. Her reckless onslaught on her own character had been no natural or even hysterical statement; there had been so much deliberation in Drusilla's manner, too much composure (how that composure had wounded and startled him at the time!); the result of the quarrel had been determined before it had been begun. All this Carlingford had put together as facts that could not be controverted, but what he had failed to discover had been the *reason* for Drusilla's determined resolution to put him out of her life. Connie's few words had convinced him that something most potent and most hurtful formed the foundation for that reason; after that he could afford to wait. And the hope which ran like fire in his veins, illumined the days as they passed, gave back a zest to life, and put sunshine on the future. He wrote frequently to Connie, just a few words, giving perhaps a brief account of what was passing with him, but chiefly dealing with Drusilla. During her illness Connie had sent him daily news; once when he had been in town he had called. His constancy, his quiet refusal to relinquish his right to share Drusilla's life, comforted the girl who was trying to fill Bertha's place, and yet the natural doubt was always there. Would this attitude last once Carlingford knew the truth?

It was this doubt which flashed into Miss Lingfield's

mind the morning after Drusilla's letter had been posted ; this doubt which clung like a burr to her every thought throughout the day. And she was only too painfully conscious that it was a feeling shared by Drusilla. Happily they had spent a busy and a fatiguing day. Catherine had remained in town till the evening, and Drusilla had been taken shopping.

"It seems I am a disgrace," she had said to Connie in the morning ; "Catherine has been overhauling my wardrobe, and saying awful things to herself."

"I have been saying rude things about your clothes for a long time past, but I suppose I don't count !" said Connie meekly.

"You are an angel and Catherine is not, that's the whole truth. Clothes, except as a covering for my body, mean nothing to me now, Connie."

But Connie repudiated that suggestion.

"Let us go together, and you shall choose a new hat for me, and I will decide on a new gown for you."

Drusilla found the shopping wearisome in the extreme, but at the same time she was grateful to Catherine for having suggested it. For, whilst her attention was being claimed every other moment, there was no opportunity for falling into brooding thought.

Later on, however, Catherine departed and dinner was served, and then the demon of agonizing suspense and hot proud fear took hold of her again.

"Oh ! Connie !" she said once, with a little passionate outburst. "Suppose he does not answer ! Oh ! I wish—*I wish* I had not written !"

"Stupid child !" said Connie. "Do you realize that your letter was posted very late last night ? You could not possibly get an answer before to-morrow."

"I—I don't believe there will be any answer," Drusilla said faintly.

But Connie laughed at this.

"Wait till to-morrow morning!"

And when the morning of the morrow dawned, Miss Lingfield stole early from her bedroom and went downstairs, wandering about the passages in her dressing-gown, and upsetting the maids at their work, whilst she waited for the postman to put Carlingford's letter in the box.

The postman came (the door was open and Miss Lingfield saw him pause and say a word to the scullery-maid who was cleaning the steps), but he gave no letters; he passed on his way.

"No letters—not one? Oh! there must be a mistake—there must be *one* letter!"

Miss Lingfield's tone was so troubled, the servants looked at one another inquiringly. Connie was asking herself several miserable questions as she toiled wearily back to her room.

"How shall I tell her? How shall I help her bear this? Why—oh, why—has he not written one word? Why did he not write to me if he could not answer her letter?"

At breakfast Drusilla met her with a smile; they did not speak about the letters. Only just when they were separating Connie said:

"You will get a telegram in a little while, darling."

Drusilla shook her head.

"I told you last night I felt there would be no answer," she said, and then the colour flashed to her face. "All the same—I am not going to be mean or regret—anything, Connie—I have done what Beth wished me to do—that is going to content me."

It was Drusilla who was the brave one all through that day. So surely had Connie counted on the man's fidelity that his silence now had something terribly cruel in it.

It was pathetic to note how, now and again, she would volunteer some possible explanation for this silence.

"Letters get lost in the post. I remember once dear father losing a most important letter he had written to a scientific friend in Paris."

Drusilla smiled at her so tenderly

"Well, let us suppose my letter is lost and that will be better for everybody."

When dinner-time came round again Connie's courage had fled; she could not eat anything.

"I never have headaches. Why should I have a headache now?" she asked wearily.

"I shall put you to bed at once," said Drusilla, strength coming to her from the other's weakness.

But Connie was obstinate.

"Not bed. I hate bed when—when there is something to worry about. Drusilla, do have some dinner, darling?"

And Drusilla eat obediently; there was a hot anguish in her heart—a sense of suffering which was new and which made her eyes misty and her pulse low; but Connie's suffering seemed greater than her own. This dear, good, loyal, devoted girl, who had sheltered her and comforted her, and given her back something of what she had lost, she must be thought of now! Self must be put in the background. So Drusilla eat and talked, and tried to make Connie believe that the silence was a matter which she could bear easily, and after dinner she took Connie into the drawing-room, and she massed the cushions comfortably on the couch, and then persuaded Connie to lie and rest.

"I know you don't want to sleep, but you look so white and tired; you must rest," she ordered.

And Connie made no protest. She was worn out for the moment; the tension had been too great.

Drusilla made her very cosy, and then sat down in an arm-chair near at hand.

"I am going to read to you, darling," she said, and she opened one of the evening papers and did read for a little while. Then she stopped and paused, and, bending forward, she saw that Connie's eyes were closed tranquilly, and that sleep had stolen on her unawares.

"She is tired out, dear soul!" Drusilla said to herself. She rose softly and in the quietest manner dropped some coal on the fire. Though spring was drifting into touch with early summer it was chilly in the evenings and a fire was agreeable.

Then she sat down again and looked at the clock.

"At a quarter past nine the postman will come, but—I am sure he will pass."

She caught the sound of the double knock on a door some little distance away. Even as this thought came, twice again she heard that cheery "Rap, rap," and then Drusilla rose very gently and crossed the room. Her ear had caught another sound—the jingle of harness and the noise of a cab pulling up. She opened the door, but she did not go out; instead she drew back and stood leaning against the wall just inside. There was a little pause; then she heard voices. The next moment she heard the rustle of Bates' skirts: the maid was coming up the stairs and she was followed by some one.

Drusilla came out of the shadows and stood in the doorway. She did not wait to hear him announced.

"Jim!" she said.

And Carlingford pushed the maid aside and took her in his arms.

He did not kiss her, he just held her tightly, yet tenderly, as one holds a child.

Then they went into the room, and with the door shut, they stood again in a silence that was so exquisite neither dared break it.

But as he released her to look at her Drusilla spoke in a whisper :

" Connie has fallen asleep ; she is worn out. She thought you would have written, and when no letter came——"

" And you ? " questioned Carlingford. " What did you think ? "

" I was afraid, Jim."

" Afraid, dear one ? "

" Yes, afraid that you would not answer or come."

He smiled.

" I have been travelling all day. I reached Yorkshire this afternoon about four, and found your letter. I left again immediately by motor for Leeds—just caught the quick train up, and never remembered till I was in the express that I had forgotten to telegraph to say I was on my road. My one and only thought was to get to you as soon as I could."

Drusilla drew him towards the fire, warning him to move softly ; their eyes met and then their hands, and the man stooped and kissed those two small transparent-looking hands.

" No," he said in a whisper, " there must be no questions—no going into the past ; at least, not now. We are together again ; that is enough ! "

His kisses were on her lips now ; then he kissed the tears away from her eyes and then Drusilla put her hand on

his lips and stopped the kisses. With a little laugh she went to the couch and bent over it.

"Connie, wake up!" she said. "Jim has come!"

A few days later Drusilla wrote a letter. It was addressed to Brian Keston, and it ran:

"DEAR MR. PREACHER,

"Because I am a very vain individual, and because I *must* stand well in the eyes of those who are my friends, I am scribbling you a few words to let you know that the words of your wisdom did not fall off stony ground. You were just a little hard on my poor resolutions. They were meant to be very good, brave, real, living resolutions, and if they failed, they are not to blame. The person to blame is me! If I had possessed the proper strength to carry things through I should not be writing to you now; but you knew me better than I knew myself! A long, long time ago you showed me what you thought of my definition of duty. Well, it is foolish, I suppose, to fight against one's nature; and yet deep down in my heart I still believe that my poor little abused resolutions were right, and that your views (which happen to coincide with everybody else's) are to a great extent wrong. This does not mean that I want to go back and pick them up again; far from it! I am full of magnificent impulses and noble sentiments, but the impulse dies once it is cold, and the noble sentiments end in one long wail for happiness—happiness—happiness at any price. The simple truth is, I must live in the sunshine and I must be loved; but I also wish to be respected, and that is why I am yearning to have you pat me on the back and commend me highly because I have obtained my heart's desire, and I call it doing my duty!

"Connie and I are going to Yorkshire to stay with Lady Southborne, but we shall be back here in a month's time. Perhaps then you might be able to come and see us ?

"D. H. "

"P.S.—Tell me, you who are so wise and who understand so well those things which are so hard to learn, do you think my happiness will make Both glad ? "

THE END

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